The Dissertation Committee for Kristin Lynn Cole Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Rum, Ram, Ruf, and Rym:
Middle English Alliterative Meters

Committee:

Thomas Cable, Supervisor

Jeffrey Walker

Jacqueline Henkel

Sandra Straubhaar

Ad Putter

Rum, Ram, Ruf, and Rym:
Middle English Alliterative Meters

by

Kristin Lynn Cole, B.A.; M.A.

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for Rebecca,

littermate and kangaroo friend;

and my mother,

for the love of words and the words of love

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Rum, Ram, Ruf, and Rym:
Middle English Alliterative Meters

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Kristin Lynn Cole, Ph.D.

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The alliterating poems written during the Alliterative Revival have mistakenly been grouped together metrically, when in fact they represent a diversity of meters. They mainly use the same phonology, however, which was also current in Chaucer and Gower's poetic dialects. In detailing the diverse meters, this study argues that the meter is simple and learnable both in the fourteenth and twenty-first centuries.

Chapter 1 establishes the current intractability of Middle English metrical studies, defines the English context in which these poems were written, and challenges the traditional bifurcation of English poetry into *accentual* and *syllable-stress*. The largest group of poems shares a common meter based on long unrhymed alliterating lines that use historical final *–e* and asymmetrical half-lines as structuring devices. Chapter 2 adds

elision to Thomas Cable's metrical system to demonstrate that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Piers Plowman* are both regular, and they belong to the same metrical tradition despite the usual move by metrists to set *Piers Plowman* to one side. Chapter 3 compares the meter of *The Destruction of Troy* with the alliterative meter described in Chapter 2 and finds that *Troy* uses a meter that only superficially resembles the alliterative meter because the poet does not employ half-line dissimilation. Chapter 4 compares the *Gawain*-poet's *Pearl* and the bobs and wheels from *Gawain* to reveal that their meters belong to neither of the two traditional schools of poetry, but is instead a medieval dolnik. Chapter 5 concludes on several of the Harley Lyrics, further problematizes the binary of *native* and *non-native* meters, and hypothesizes that the medieval audience expected a diversity of metrical experiments combining these traditions in various ways.

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Chapter 1:

The Alliterative Revival, Then and Now

> But trusteth wel, I am a southren man,
> I kan nat geeste—rum, ram, ruf—by lettre,
> Ne, God woot, rym holde I but litel bettre;
> And therfore, if yow list - I wol nat glose -
> I wol yow telle a myrie tale in prose
> To knytte up al this feeste, and make an ende.
> (Parson's Prologue 42-47)

MIDDLE ENGLISH POETRY

This study reevaluates the meters of several of the alliterative poems that co-exist in the time of the Alliterative Revival and in the space of the West Midlands; the main characteristic that links these poems is their use of alliteration in patterns that have their source in native and not continental traditions. Apart from that similarity, they exhibit striking metrical differences, and the neglect of these differences through the traditional lumping together of alliterative poetry into one category has had two deleterious effects. First, it has long obscured the rules that individuate and define the meters of these poems; the resulting metrical muddle is intractable and has hindered the study and teaching of these poems. Metrists who have described the alliterative poems of this time as a single event emerging from a single source or school that has a single explanation have sought to unify that which defies unity, thus more often bewildering than captivating the audience. Second, these poets have been placed in a false binary with the London poets, particularly Chaucer; this binary has hobbled advancement in the study of alliterative meter because it has always been Other. What would be inconceivable in discussing the

poetry of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton—neglecting their various meters and verse forms—is the pedagogical reality for a group of poems that are at once peripheral and provincial, yet sophisticated and complex. The main contention here is that poetry is governed by rules, that the rules are knowable, and that the poems presented in the following chapters readily demonstrate different and definable rules.

Many non-metrists simply shy away from discussion of Middle English alliterative meter; others engage it with the available yet hopelessly outdated descriptions available in literature anthologies and reference sources. From student textbooks to specialist editions, the definition of strong-stress meter provided by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley in 1959 still dominates the available descriptions of alliterative meter: "The gabble of weaker syllables, now more, now fewer, between the major stresses obscures all the minor stresses and relieves them of any structural duty."[1] For example, *The Longman Anthology of British Literature* defines "accentual verse" thus: "Verse with lines established by counting accents only, *without regard to the number of unstressed syllables*. This was the dominant form of verse in English until the time of Chaucer."[2] *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* claims that "There is no rule determining the number of unstressed syllables" in this meter.[3] Norton's *Essential Literary Terms* offers a similar definition of "accentual meter": "used primarily in

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[1] W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Concept of Meter: An Exercise in Abstraction," *PMLA,* 74 (1959), 592. Their description also haunts metrists' discussions of Middle English alliterative meter.

[2]This definition has not changed since the first edition was published in 1969, despite the fact that both statements are inaccurate. "Literary and Cultural Terms," in *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, ed. David Damrosch et al., 3rd ed (Boston: Longman, 2006), vol. 1, p. 666, emphasis mine.

[3] "Old and Middle English Prosody," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Major Authors*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and M. H. Abrams, 8th ed. (New York: Norton, 2006), 19-21.

Germanic languages, including Old English, the key feature is the number of stressed syllables in each line, *without regard to the unstressed syllables*."[4] *Western Wind* claims that strong-stress poetry disregards syllable counting, and therefore, "the number of unaccented syllables does not matter."[5] *Writing Metrical Poetry* defines "accentual verse" as a system that "demands four accents in each line," "lacks any sense of the classical foot," and is in modern times "mostly forgotten."[6] Derek Attridge introduces Old and Middle English strong-stress meter with a revealing question-and-answer:

> What happens if the four-beat line is allowed to take more than two unstressed syllables between beats, or to use virtual offbeats freely? Or if additional stresses occur between the beats in positions that prevent them from being demoted? Or run-on lines and absence of rhyme inhibit the emergence of the four-line unit? The most likely result is *verse with little feeling of being metrical at all*; a kind of free verse, in other words.[7]

Attridge almost immediately concedes that this verse "is not quite as free as my description suggests," but the implication is that the "free" use of unstressed syllables

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[4] "Meter," in *Essential Literary Terms: A Brief Norton Guide with Exercises*, ed. Sharon Hamilton, (New York, Norton, 2006). 198, emphasis mine.

[5] "Strong-Stress Rhythms." in *Western Wind: An Introduction to Poetry*, ed. David Mason and John Frederick Nims, 5th ed (Boston, McGraw Hill, 2006), 235-42.

[6] William Baer, in *Writing Metrical Poetry: Contemporary Lessons in Mastering Traditional Forms*, (Cincinnati, Writer's Digest Books, 2006). 200. Baer implies that accentual meter is somehow deficient, a sentiment that Timothy Steele shares when comparing it to Chaucer's verse, which he describes as "the more precisely and flexibly organized accentual-syllabic system": "For all of its vigor, the accentual-alliterative line—with its requirements of structural alliteration and medial division—is restrictive and thumping" (252). Timothy Steele, *All the Fun's in How You Say a Thing: an Explanation of Meter and Versification* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1999).

[7] Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 87-8, emphasis mine. He ends his discussion of strong-stress meter by claiming that Old English verse and rap music are the two main forms of this kind of meter (96).

makes these poems less metrical. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines the meter of the Alliterative Revival as one based on four metrical stresses and alliteration; the unstressed syllables are omitted from the "few basic metrical principles."[8] Finally, Dana Gioia opens his recent article "Accentual Meter" with a conflation of *Beowulf*, *Piers Plowman*, nursery rhymes, rap, and cowboy poetry, and then argues: "The basic principles of accentual verse are stunningly simple. There is, in fact, only one steadfast rule: there must be an identical number of strong stresses in each line."[9] These definitions have all appeared since revelations in the 1980s proved the inability of Wimsatt and Beardsley's "gabble" to accurately describe the meters of alliterative verse in all their diversity.

The second and perhaps more important consequence of not effectively defining these poems beyond their alliterative patterns is that they have been placed in false opposition to the concomitant poetic developments in London, most famously exemplified by Chaucer's experiments combining a Romance meter with a Germanic language. Indeed, when Chaucer's Parson, pious brother of a pious Plowman, forthrightly states in his Prologue that "I kan nat geeste 'rum, ram, ruf,' by lettre," that is, he cannot compose an historical romance ('geeste') in alliterative verse,[10] literary

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[8] Richard Osberg, "English Prosody: Middle English," in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 354-8. 356.

[9] "Accentual Meter," in *An Exaltation of Forms: Contemporary Poets Celebrate the Diversity of Their Art*, ed. Annie Finch and Kathrine Varnes (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2002), 15-23. He claims that "even a child can master this meter without recourse to pen and paper," which is true of the very rhythmically regular nursery rhymes but not of alliterative meter in either Old or Middle English.

[10] This definition of *geeste* is Seth Lerer's, from his Introduction to *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, 12. The definition is offered to describe the choices the Host gives Chaucer-Pilgrim after the former declares of the latter's *Tale of Sir Thopas*: "Thy drasty ryming is nat worth a toord." The other option the Host offers

historians have assumed that this statement is the "southren man" Chaucer's dismissal of the genre of alliterative poetry. In writing "Chaucer as an English Writer," D. Vance Smith claims that this single line of poetry has crystallized for many literary scholars what they have perceived as "Chaucer's neglect of native English traditions" (107).[11] But in the next line, the Parson also dismisses "rym" because he cannot compose rhyming poetry, and tells his audience that he will tell his tale in prose. In other words, the Parson is selecting among the three choices he perceives; the only value judgment he explicitly makes concerns his perception of his own poetic abilities, though perhaps he sees poetry as an avenue for lies ('I wol nat glose').[12] And of course we cannot miss the basic fact of Chaucer's acknowledgment of alliterative poetry, both in the Parson's words and in the person of his Plowman. Chaucer's Plowman is remarkably similar to Piers the Plowman, and this charitable laborer in dung can only be found in these two texts.[13] Whatever mockery or dismissal a scholar can read into the Parson's words, neither mockery nor dismissal can be seen in this direct borrowing that acknowledges the imaginative power of Langland's poetry. The fact that the Parson and Plowman are brothers further emphasizes this homage to an alliterative poem and acknowledgment of alliterative poetry.

But the connection between the two kinds of poetry is more thoroughgoing. We can create a binary of native language and meter versus imported languages and meters,

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is prose; thus, the three ways the pilgrims imagine to tell a tale are in rhymed verse, alliterative poetry, or prose.

[11] D. Vance Smith, "Chaucer as an English Writer," 107.

[12] See Smith, 110-12.

[13] Smith argues that such a respectful image of a laborer is "unprecedented in traditional representations of laborers" in his argument that Chaucer's Plowman in directly indebted to Langland (93).

but these factors are causes, not effects, that influenced the resulting spectrum of Middle English meters written across England at this time. In this fertile period of poetic production, the two great experiments were Chaucer's nascent iambic pentameter and the strong-stress meter that was so quickly developed and deployed in the West Midlands. Not only did these two developments happen simultaneously, but they also demonstrably did not occur in isolation or even opposition to each other; the rhythms of the poems themselves show a shared understanding of the metrical possibilities available to *all* poets of English at that time. Chaucer writes in "alliterating lines," which Smith carefully separates from alliterative verse; he claims that Chaucer does "geeste" in some battle scenes from *The Knight's Tale* and in "The Legend of Cleopatra" in *The Legend of Good Women*.[14] More important, though, is the fact that we can use Chaucer's prosody to understand the alliterative poets' metrical decisions. The original ideas in this dissertation developed from this surprising fact: although the alliterative poets have used a different poetic vocabulary, they employed the same metrical tightening and loosening toolkit, such as elision, as the London poets.[15]

Both traditions exploited the potential of a language that had been shedding inflectional endings so quickly that syllabic doublets emerged out of older, inflected forms and newer, shortened forms. The story of English's loss of inflections begins long before the fourteenth century, and even before the arrival of conquering Normans in 1066. But by 1350, it is highly likely that the various inflectional endings that had first

[14] Smith 109. He offers several examples.
[15] The fact that Chaucer's prosody is the most studied and thus the one used here does not mean that these features are peculiar to his poetry.

been eroded to final *–e* had mostly dropped out of the spoken dialects of the West Midlands, while in the more conservative dialect of London, speakers could be found who actively retained these older forms. It is ironic that the West Midland poets who may have spoken with the innovated forms wrote almost exclusively in the older forms, while the London poets either spoke or heard the competing forms and chose between them as needed to satisfy the demands of the meters in which they were writing. It is perhaps not an accident that the language of this West Midlands poetry could be easily read by a London audience; as discussed below, M. L. Samuels assumes this was the audience for whom William Langland wrote *Piers Plowman*. The West Midland poets' choice solely to use the older, historical forms makes sense in context of their obvious interest in traditional native poetry; however, the choice to compose using word forms they probably did not speak combined with the flaws inherent to scribal transmission long obscured the importance of these extra syllables, most especially final *–e*, to the meter.

But there are further complications; to confine the discussion of poetry in the latter half of the fourteenth century to Chaucer and the strong-stress poets of the West Midlands is to omit the other poetic experiments, one of which occurs in microcosm in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Most of this poem is written in the meter described above: it looks to Germanic alliterative meter and is historical in its emphasis on unrhymed alliterative lines, linguistic stress, and older word forms. The 505 lines of the rhyming bobs and wheels, however, are not in the same meter; they are more reminiscent of Chaucer's alternating meter, but to say it is iambic trimeter is to ignore important

differences that are the product of the poet, not the scribe. The final lines of the poem easily demonstrate this difference; they are scanned according to the principles argued in Chapters 2 and 4, but for now it suffices to say that / denotes a stressed syllable, **x** denotes an unstressed syllable, and the symbol • denotes an elided syllable:

x x / x x / x / x x / x
Þus in Arthurus day þis aunter bitidde,

x / x / x x / / x x / x
Þe Brutus bokez þerof beres wyttenesse;

x x / x x / x / / x x x / x
Syþen Brutus þe bolde burne boȝed hider fyrst,

x x x / • x • x / x / x x / x
After þe segge and þe asaute watz sesed at Troye,

x / x
iwysse;

x x / x / x / x
Mony aunterez here-biforne

x / x / • x / x
Haf fallen suche er þis;

x x / x / x /
Now þat bere þe croun of þorne,

x / x / x / x
He bryng vs to his blysse (ll. 2523-2530)[16]

The first four lines are in the native, unrhymed alliterative meter. The short, one-beat bob finishes off the last long line, and is then followed by the four, three-beat wheel lines. In

[16] All lines from *Gawain* are taken from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, rev. by Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967).

this short section, the metrical principles argued in this chapter have been applied, yielding perfectly regular lines in both meters.

Gawain is often described as the technical masterpiece of the Alliterative Revival poems; how do the bobs and wheels belong in the creation of this masterpiece, when we cannot be sure of their meter? If the bob-and-wheel lines do not follow the rules of the strong-stress meter or the alternating meter, then they must follow a different set of rules. In other words, poets of this time had more than two choices, and strong-stress meter and strictly alternating meter should be seen not as a binary but end points of a range of choices.

WAR, PLAGUE, AND POETRY: EMERGING ENGLISH

The history of fourteenth-century England helps explain developments in the poetry of this time. The defining historical events of the period were the beginning in 1337 of what came to be called the Hundred Years' War and the arrival of the Black Plague in 1348. The Hundred Years' War greatly increased nationalism in both England and France, the outgrowth of which affected the education of English children: "English began to replace French as the language of instruction in grammar schools around 1350 through the efforts of John Cornwall and Richard Pencrich, both of Oxford."[17] The arrival of the bubonic plague, however, devastated England internally. The plague killed from one-third to one-half of the population, which caused labor shortages and thus allowed for a mobile labor force previously unknown. The Peasants' Revolt of 1381 was a revolt by newly empowered people against poll taxes to raise funds for an old war. While the war may have increased English nationalism, the plague and later uprising privileged English language in particular.[18]

But an interest in English as a written language, and thus potentially as a literary language, had already solidified in the West Midlands before the Hundred Years' War began. In situating the Harley Lyrics both in time and space, Daniel Birkholz presents the West Midlands in the early fourteenth century as wealthy, sophisticated, and international, with a large number of clerks regularly traveling between Hereford and the

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[17] From Hans Frede Nielsen, *From Dialect to Standard: English in England 1154-1776* (Odense: UP of Southern Denmark, 2005), 16.
[18] Nielsen 9.

papacy in Avignon.[19] Such congress created a high level of bureaucratic correspondence in English, as Michael Clanchy has demonstrated.[20] Birkholz's argument presents the Harley Lyrics as the literary product of such an environment, but it also reconstructs the prevailing perception of this area of England: "The Harley Lyrics are disconcerting to literary historians due to their 'sudden' appearance out in the provincial 'backwater' of Herefordshire."[21] The Harley Lyrics stand as a testament to a taste in the West Midlands for vernacular literature that predates and perhaps explains why the poetry written in this region during the Alliterative Revival evidences such a high level of art and literacy. While we can debate the extent to which these poets were the inheritors of the Old English alliterative tradition, we cannot question that that the West Midlands was a logical place for the development of rich and varied native poetry.

Even given the chaos that must have ensued following the arrival of the Plague, the West Midlands was an ideal environment for the alliterative experiment that erupted at mid-century. Here were the schools, the scholars, the love of English language and the native alliterative patterns; the strengthening nationalism evident in the legitimization of English first in the classroom and then in Parliament (1362) could explain why a group of poets would decide to work in a meter drawn from native rather than continental rhythms. There are too many similarities between the alliterative meter of Old English and the strong-stress alliterative meter of Middle English to deny a connection between the two,

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[19] "Yet the first half of the century presented Hereford and Worcester ecclesiastics, from notaries to canons, with unprecedented opportunity for travel, plus access to international literati" (Birkholz 12). MS. Harley 2253 was produced c. 1340; it will be discussed further in the conclusion.
[20] M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).
[21] Birkholz 7.

but there are enough important differences to doubt that the meter had survived in the same manner that the alliterative patterns had. The length of the lines alone shows the transformation in the English language from *Beowulf* to *Gawain.* Here are the opening lines of each of these poems, respectively:

> Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
> þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon,
> hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
> (*Beowulf* 1-3)

> SIÞEN þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,
> Þe borȝ brittened and brent to bondeȝ and askez,
> Þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt
> Watz tried for his tricherie þe trewest on erthe.
> (*Gawain* 1-4)

Even at the purely aesthetic level, the Middle English lines are different. The rhythm underlying them is, not surprisingly, also different, and their use of alliteration also differs as a consequence. But these fourteenth-century alliterative poems are indebted to Old English meter and in the end have more in common with it than not.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE B-VERSE RHYTHM

This study is predicated on the principle that the rules of any poetry are teachable and learnable. For poems of this kind to proliferate so suddenly and across a fairly wide region of England and to accommodate such a wide range of genres, there must have been some means of collaboration.[22] Even without evidence of this kind of transmission, no other reason could explain the depth and breadth of this poetic revolution. The implications of such cooperation are simple and powerful: not only were the rules teachable and learnable, they must have been fairly simple and flexible. In other words, there is every reason to expect that these rules can again be teachable and learnable to the current community of scholars. Their apparent inscrutability is a product not of the poems but of our inability to understand what was on the manuscript page and reduce it to its fundamental parts. It is an irony that such a backward-looking poetry could only become knowable with the rise of a technology that would fundamentally shift the way we do scholarship.

In the 1980s, the advent of the personal computer advanced the study of Middle English alliterative metrics in one great bound. After over a century of competing and often conflicting theories posited by modern linguists, the computer's singular ability to collate vast amounts of data helped establish the fact that at least one half of the long alliterative line, the b-verse, was governed by explicit rules. The two metrists who

[22] It is tempting to use the word *school*, not least because it has been used before to describe this phenomenon, but the paradigm of the classroom—of teacher and student or master and pupil—fails to capture the dynamic of equals. In the same way that Chaucer and Gower shared ideas in creating a more rigidly alternating meter, so the alliterative poets collaborated in developing their meter.

rediscovered this regularity,[23] Hoyt Duggan and Thomas Cable, agreed that the b-verse must have one and only one long dip and two and only two beats. In light of their very divergent starting points, methodologies, and theoretical bents, it is surprising that they concurred at all.

Cable's theory depends on what is *not* on the manuscript page; he argues that the poets of the Alliterative Revival had access to the historically inflected forms of words that may have lost final *–e* in the spoken language. Cable theorizes poets who knew or were taught, for example, that verbs from the three languages spoken in England during this unprecedented linguistic upheaval[24]—Old English, Anglo-Norman/Old French, and Old Norse—retained final *–e* in the infinitive. He does not, however, account for elision, which this study adds to the scansions. Using this approach to manuscripts, readers and editors can easily distinguish scribal departures from the original poem, as it stands on the manuscript page.

In accounting for the historically inflected forms of the words on the page, Cable crafted very tidy rules for both the first half-line, or a-verse, and the second half-line, or b-verse. Not only must the b-verse have one and only one long dip either in front of or between the two requisite stresses, but it must also end in a single final weak syllable. The a-verse is metrically dissimilar from the b-verse and most often has either a

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[23] Cable and Duggan's discovery confirmed Karl Luick's hypothesis about the requirements of the b-verse. Luick, "Die englische Stabreimzeile im XIV, XV, und XVI Jahrhundert," *Anglia*, 9 (1889), 392-443, 553-618.

[24] By 1250, English had lost its system of grammatical gender, and it remains the only Indo-European language that lacks grammatical gender. Other Germanic languages, such as Swedish, are showing a collapse of the masculine and feminine into one category, but this category remains distinct from neuter. Given how quickly these changes occurred in English—and how uncertain speakers became of their own speech patterns—it is entirely possible that different generations spoke with differing levels of inflection.

minimum of two strong dips with two metrical prominences, or three ictuses with no restrictions on length of dips in the so-called "extended" a-verse.[25] In addition to these permutations, there are also the a-verses that simply could not be b-verses, even if they appear to have the a b-verse rhythm; Cable and Ad Putter have since independently discovered that a-verses can be dissimilar from b-verses by ending on a primary or secondary stress rather than a weak syllable, which b-verses must end in.[26]

Duggan has found Cable's rules too tidy, and yet at the same time, too loose. He maintains that the final weak syllable on the b-verse is optional, not mandatory, and he sees a "normative statement" and not a "general rule" in the poets' definite tendency to include two strong dips in the a-verse. As would be expected, their peers have supported one or the other theory, and the majority have supported Duggan's more conservative approach to final *-e*. In 2005, J. A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre used Duggan's theories in the third edition of *A Book of Middle English*[27]; in the same year, however, Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter published an article on infinitives in *–e* and *–en* that presents compelling evidence that the final *–e* on infinitives was expressed.[28] In a very real way, Duggan and Cable's theories have created a stalemate in Middle English

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[25] This label is misleading; a detailed argument against it is presented in Chapter 2, but it is the name most scholars use.

[26] Putter, "Chaucer's Verse and Alliterative Poetry: Grammar, Metre, and Some Secrets of the Syllable Count," *Poetica* 67 (2007), 19-35.

[27] "*If* there is a dip at the end of the line it is always weak" (60; emphasis mine). *A Book of Middle English*, 3rd ed, (Maldon, MA, Blackwell, 2005).

[28] "The Distribution of Infinitives in *–e* and *–en* in Some Middle English Alliterative Poems," *Medium Ævum,* 74 (2005), 221-47. On the one hand, Jefferson and Putter agree with Cable and disagree with Duggan that final *–e* on infinitives were a part of the poets' meter; on the other hand, they do not want "to say, as Cable has done, that final *–e* should *always* be pronounced in infinitives" (239-40; emphasis theirs). Despite this hesitation, their work supports for a specific structure Cable's requirement of a final unstressed syllable on the b-verse.

alliterative metrics that belies the promise their discovery first held to resolve longstanding issues and move the study of this poetry forward an unprecedented step. Not surprisingly, neither theory has trickled down into the anthologies used in both upper and lower division undergraduate courses; the jury is still out on who has the right theory. This study hopes to break the stalemate and move the conversation forward in useful ways.

The first iteration of the two metrists' sets of rules reveals several telling differences between Duggan and Cable's approach to Middle English alliterative metrics, not least of which is their opposing approaches to the status of historical final *–e*. The source of their disagreements, though, is revealed in their methodologies, in how they collected data and created their respective corpora. Cable collected lines from various poems that exist in a single manuscript, while Duggan focused his attention on multiple manuscripts to gather what he called "evidence of complementary distribution."[29] Duggan has in fact disdained Cable's reliance on single manuscripts. Jefferson and Putter capture Duggan's position best: "At the heart of Duggan's distrust of the single-manuscript poems is the knowledge that scribal corruption is liable to distort the practices of the original poets."[30]

Cable's rules are stricter than Duggan's because Cable's review of his corpus revealed that the poets used final *–e* as a reflex of various historical endings; he reached

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[29] Duggan, "The Shape of the B-Verse in Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Speculum* 61.3 (1986), 564-592. 569.

[30] "Distribution of Infinitives" 222. I have only found praise of his and Turville-Petre's *Wars of Alexander*, so perhaps this complementary distribution method might work with poems that exist in several versions. But this method offers very little to the student or editor of a manuscript that exists in only one manuscript.

this conclusion by not excluding any of these endings in his scansions. In fact, his decision to use such a rigid application of this rule has aroused criticism of his perceived insistence that final *–e* must *always* be pronounced; this rigidity was self-imposed, meant only to establish the theory and not maintain it. Both metrists have modified their extreme stances: Cable is now allowing for elision, and Duggan is now allowing for final *–e* when it is metrically convenient, though he has not defined what convenience means. Since elision of final *–e* requires that it exist in the first place, Cable's shift is the less dramatic of the two.

Upon establishing his theory of the b-verse, Duggan concluded that such a revolutionary insight should directly influence the emendations on metrical grounds that editors are able to make. In 1986, he noted that "few editors have dared" to emend a poem or select a variant of a poem on metrical grounds.[31] He proposes that editors can now dare to make the bold emendations, definitely in the b-verse and probably in the a-verse, that previously lacked theoretical support: "In short, it becomes possible to distinguish what poets wrote from what scribes sometimes miswrote."[32] Indeed, undergirding all of Duggan's methodologies and theories is a serious mistrust of the manuscript, or rather, the scribe who may have either knowingly or unknowingly botched the transcription of the verse. He excoriates editors for what he perceives as "increased

[31] "Shape of the B-verse" 564.

[32] "Shape of the B-Verse" 569. He argues: "scholars have been content to list the forms as they appear in the manuscripts without attempting further scrutiny, without subjecting the raw data to a more penetrating analysis that has as its object distinguishing what the poets wrote from what the scribes botched" (567).

fidelity to the MANUSCRIPT and infidelity to the POEM."[33] The only modern editors he explicitly exempts from these accusations are Kane, Donaldson, and Thorlac Turville-Petre.[34] He compliments them on their keen ability to distinguish the authorial from the scribal and castigates the editors who have "embraced the methods of students of Old English meter"[35]: "they have incorporated into their data bases quantities of unauthentic metrical material, dozens, even hundreds of lines and verses that poets never wrote, lines that have been botched by an undeterminable series of more or less conscientious scribes."[36] The rest of the lot is "maidenly,"[37] too reverent of the manuscript and thus unwilling to do the true job of editing in order to avoid accusations of "rewriting the poem."[38]

But such a position is risky if the metrical theory is inaccurate, and such a revolution in editing has remained impossible; Cable's theory directly contradicts Duggan's concerning the status of final *–e* in the poems, which in the b-verse means at the very least that an editor would have to choose whether the b-verses require a final, unaccented syllable, as Cable argues, or whether it is optional, as Duggan maintains. But the status of final *–e* has remained a vexed issue in the study of Middle English dialects,

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[33] "Libertine Scribes and Maidenly Editors: Meditations on Textual Criticism and Metrics," in *English Historical Metrics*, ed. C.B. McCully & J.J. Anderson, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 219-237. 223, emphasis his.

[34] It is a little disingenuous of Duggan not to include his own name with Turville-Petre's, his co-editor of *Wars of Alexander*.

[35] He specifically accuses Cable of this methodology.

[36] "Stress Assignment in Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 89:3 (1990), 309-329. 315.

[37] His language is surprisingly emasculating when there were already several editions written by women.

[38] "Libertine Scribes," 233. Duggan concludes his call to bold editing with this statement: "I submit that it is the proper task of librarians to conserve documents and of editors to conserve poems."

not least because the vernacular is often conflated with literary language. As M. L. Samuels observes concerning William Langland's poetic dialect, "Langland must have made at least some use of grammatical final *–e*" and that "it is perfectly reasonable to read the B-text in the form in which it would have been best understood by the London audience for which it was intended."[39] Duggan ignores all of these possibilities in his dogmatic insistence that b-verses should be emended in line with his b-verse rules without acknowledging that there is serious disagreement about which version of these rules and their underlying phonology is accurate.

Ironically, as rigid as Duggan's rules of the b-verse are—he is utterly convinced that every single b-verse can now be confidently edited to fit the rhythmic pattern he and Cable uncovered[40]—he is equally convinced that the a-verse has no discernable rhythm. Cable's observations, as fully described in *The English Alliterative Tradition,* rest on a consistent application of rules to each side of the caesura, with the result offering a look into the shape of the a-verse, too. The metrists agree, however, on the fundamental nature of the meter of these lines as opposed to Chaucer and Gower's verse:

> Unlike iambic pentameter and other foot-counted meters in which part of the metrical structure of the line is the rule-governed tension between the abstract metrical pattern and the actual phonetic realizations of that pattern in speech, alliterative poetry has far more liberal constraints and a nearly complete absence of tension between the meter and its realizations in

[39] M. L. Samuel, "Langland's Dialect," *Medium Aevum* 54 (1985), 232-247. 244.
[40] "Editors of Middle English alliterative verse can now confidently identify as scribal error all the b-verses that violate the distributional rule" ("Shape of the B-Verse," 578)

> sound . . . . alliterative verse represents a selection of natural speech rhythms. Though everything in our traditions of reading and writing about poetry might lead us to value poets who violate the norms in syntax and meter, nothing in the structure of alliterative verse itself would have led late medieval poets to "make it new" by violating the fundamental conditions of metricality.[41]

Arguably, these poets did "make it new" by making it old; they could have perceived in the Old English lines a feature that for them might have been new, the emphasis not on metrical template but on linguistic stress highlighted and emphasized by the frequent intersection of ictus and alliteration. Despite the changes they would have had to make to accommodate their Middle English to such a pattern, the choice to mimic the Old English meter would have resulted in a meter that is its first cousin, three centuries removed.

[41] Duggan, "Stress Assignment," 312.

TEXTS, TERMS, AND TAXONOMIES

Understanding the metrical relationship between the Old English and Middle English meters helps differentiate these meters from meters that superficially resemble them, and in the case of the *Gawain*-poet, could be written by the same poet. The four poems studied and scanned here were chosen because they demonstrate the different rules. Two of the poems are *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, both of which exist in a single manuscript, MS Cotton Nero A.x. The other two poems are *The Destruction of Troy*, also preserved in a single manuscript, MS Hunterian V.2.8, and *Piers Plowman*, which is unusual for existing in fifty-four manuscripts. Fundamental to this study is the diversity of alliterative poetry; many scholars would place the latter three of these poems in the category of Alliterative Revival poems, but this study argues that *Troy* follows different rules. *Pearl* has defied classification for decades because it does not fit neatly into the two perceived schools of poetry; this study classifies it because it, too, follows different rules, though these rules are far more pervasive in English poetry than most scholars have accepted.

Piers Plowman and the long, unrhymed lines of *Gawain* are written in an inductive meter, much as the Old English alliterative poems were. Inductive meters are governed by a different set of rules than their opposite, deductive meters. The older Germanic poetries are in inductive meters, because the metrical patterns of each half-line do not derive from a pre-existing template, such as the octosyllable or iambic pentameter, which mold the language into a fixed rhythm that creates an obvious pattern. Inductive

meters are created by a grammatical hierarchy of stress, and the pattern of each line is a surprise: it is known only after it is mapped by the stress assigned to nouns, adjectives, function words, and so on. Deductive meters are the staple of English poetry; the alternating pattern "ta tum ta tum ta tum ta tum ta tum" of iambic pentameter is the best example.

The nature of English as a stress-timed language plays a particular role in the inductive meter of these alliterative poems. The "now more, now fewer" unstressed syllables of the alliterative line exploit this aspect of English: "it is a curious feature of English poetry that a single unstressed syllable between stressed syllables can often be replaced by more than one syllable, or by no syllable at all, and the meter remains intact."[42] Stress-timed languages such as English differ from syllable-timed languages such as French in that the same amount of time seems to elapse between linguistic stresses, which fall on nouns, adjectives, and verbs, regardless of how many unstressed syllables occur in between. Here is an example from prose:

x x x / x / x x x / x /
It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

Interestingly, the more unstressed syllables there are, the more the line seems to speed up, and the fewer unstressed syllables there are, the more it seems to slow down. Here is a much more current example, the opening of line of the song "The Wayward Wind" written by Stan Lebowsky and Herb Newman and made famous by Gogi Grant:

x / x / x x / x /
The wayward wind is a restless wind

[42] Cable, "Stress Timing and the History of English Prosody," 511.

Or, as John Masefield wrote in his poem, "The West Wind":

x x / / x / / x x / /
It's a warm wind, the west wind, full of birds' cries

In these examples, the lines noticeably speed up to accommodate unstressed syllables and slow down noticeably when there are none. Maartje Schreuder uses the title of her dissertation to demonstrate this phenomenon:

x / x / x x x / x x / x
prosodic processes in language and music

She observes that "Stretches of unstressed words or syllables are therefore compressed, while adjacent stressed syllables are rhythmically separated by 'silent beats.'"[43]

On the other hand, in a syllable-timed language such as French, each syllable takes about the same time to pronounce, so there is no sense of speeding up and slowing down as there is in English. The opening line of Serge Gainsbourg's "La Javanaise," which alliterates extensively on the consonants in the word *javanaise*, provides a good contrast to the Gogi Grant lyric above:

j'avoue j'en ai bavé pas vous mon amour

[43] Schreuder, 39. This ebb and flow of English stress, readily noticed by the casual observer and theorized first by Pike and later Abercrombie, remained unquantifiable for decades. In recent years, linguists have adjusted how they test for isochrony, the notion that the same amount of time seems to elapse between linguistic stresses regardless of whether unstressed syllables occur between them. Port and Cummins conducted studies in the 1990s that revealed the need for participants to organize the stresses of repeated phrases with metronomes and other outside temporal regulators; this process is called self-entrainment. Grabe and Low decided not to test for isochrony via measurements of interstress intervals or syllable durations; they "measured duration of vowels, and the duration of intervals between vowels in a passage of speech." Their data show a distinction between stress-timed and syllable-timed languages, though it is not strong and does not include all the languages in the world (538).

In French, the speed of the line remains the same, regardless of the kind of word. It is hardly surprising, then, that deductive meters emerged from syllable-timed languages, whereas inductive meters emerged from stress-timed languages.

In the inductive meter of the Alliterative Revival, the b-verse has a number of rules, and the a-verse must simply be different from the b-verse. In fact, once the first dip is known, the rest of the half0line is perfectly predictable. Thus, the b-verse has a smaller number of possible patterns than the a-verse, which in being fundamentally different has many more permutations, though again the list is finite. This study joins previous ones in supporting Cable's b-verse rules, which require two and only two beats, one and only one long dip preceding one of these two beats, and a final unstressed syllable at the end. This study has found no dips in the b-verse greater than five syllables, and even the five syllable dips occur only in *Piers*, which is notorious for its longer lines, so it is likely that other poems had stricter limits on the length of b-verse dips.[44] To sum all this up in a picture, the following two rhythms meet the minimal metrical requirements of the b-verse; **/** represents a beat or ictus, and **x** represents an unstressed syllable:

x x / / x

/ x x / x

[44] Putter in "Chaucer's Verse and Alliterative Poetry," notes: "In the b-verse long dips appear to be restricted to a maximum of three unstressed syllables" (32, note 12). This evidence is based on Noriko Inoue's dissertation on *Gawain*. In the 353 lines of *Gawain* scanned for this study, eleven b-verses, or 3%, were found to have dips of four syllables, though none had more syllables. Please see Chapter 2 for more information.

In contrast, the following two rhythms meet the maximal requirement, which means that an optional weak syllable appears either before or after the first ictus to eliminate clashing stress:

x x x x x / x / x

x / x x x x x / x

The a-verse can be any other rhythm, including the option of a third beat and secondary stress from native and foreign words.

To understand the difference between inductive and deductive meters is to perform them. Chaucer's meter finds a compromise between the stress-timing of English and the syllable-timing of the decasyllable, and the result is a deductive meter with regular stresses; it thus provides a useful foil to the inductive meter of the Alliterative Revival. Because Chaucer's anonymous Plowman is described in much the same language as the character of Piers the Plowman, the respective descriptions will highlight the differences in meter.[45] In each line the punctuation has been removed, and the symbol • represents an elided syllable:

x / • x x / x x / x x x / x
I dyke and I deule I do that treuthe hoteth

/ x / •x / x / x x •x / x
Some tyme I sowe and some tyme I thresche (*Piers* B.V.552-3)

x / x / • x / x / • x / x
He wolde threshe and therto dyke and delue (General Prologue 536)

[45] These examples are drawn from D. Vance Smith's article "Chaucer as an English Writer," where he uses them to compare the language, not the meter.

The shared vocabulary of these lines provides a wonderful contrast to the differing meter; significantly, elision in Langland's lines does not affect the meter by slowing it down, whereas Chaucer uses elision to maintain a regular alternation between the syllables. It is also significant that the two lines of Langland show that the audience can never guess what rhythmic permutation the next line will take, whereas Chaucer's rhythm is regular and predictable.

Chapter 2 defines the meter of the poems of the Alliterative Revival, and it uses elision in testing Cable's theories, including recent innovations, on the long lines of *Gawain* (ll. 1126-1552, omitting bobs and wheels) and the Prologue and Passus VI of *Piers Plowman*, B. Chapter 3 argues not only that *The Destruction of Troy* follows different rules from the poems of the Alliterative Revival, but it also describes these rules and proposes a reason for them. Chapter 4 of this dissertation argues the existence of a meter in *Pearl*, based on scansions of ll. 1-300, and the 505 bobs and wheels of *Gawain* that is deductive but unlike Chaucer and Gower's experiments in alternating meters; this meter is a medieval dolnik, because it most closely resembles the modern English dolnik described by Marina Tarlinskaja in *Strict Stress-Meter in English Poetry*; please see the key below for a full description. Finally, Chapter 5 connects Chaucer and his poems to the alliterative poets in the West, takes a harder look at the alliterative Harley Lyrics as one of several directions of study, and considers the importance of audience to meter.

KEY TERMS AND METHODS

1. In order to create transparency, almost every line of poetry in this dissertation has been scanned on all syllables. All too often, metrists offer no scansions or scansions only of the beats and not the dips. Incomplete scansions hinder progress and stall the conversation.

2. The methods of scansion are mostly standard. The symbol **/** is used to denote ictus, and the symbol **x** denotes a weak syllable. To avoid ambiguity, this study uses the symbol • to denote elision.

3. The alliterative long-line is divided into two halves or **hemistichs**. The first half-line is also called the **a-verse**, and the second half-line is also called the **b-verse**.

4. The two kinds of meter presented here are **inductive** and **deductive** meters. **Deductive meters** have an ideal template, e.g., iambic pentameter, and the language must conform to the pattern or its standard variations in every line. This ideal rhythm is established and maintained throughout the poem, and a skip in the rhythm would be an unhappy surprise. **Inductive** meters, on the other hand, emerge from linguistic stress, though there are rules that must be followed to craft metrical lines. In this way, each line is a surprise because the audience never knows what the rhythm of the next line will be.

5. **Dolnik** is a deductive meter, meaning that the rhythm alternates regularly enough that the audience keeps the melody. The **stress-timed** nature of English means that stresses occur at roughly equivalent intervals, regardless of whether there is no, one, or two syllables in between. **Dolnik** exploits this feature in that it allows for the occasional two-syllable dip. The **medieval dolnik** predates Chaucer's decasyllables and, therefore, iambs and iambic pentameter, and seems to have been perceived as perfectly metrical by medieval audiences, since it is one logical product of harnessing the stress-timed nature of English to the alternating **syllable-timed** Continental meters, as evidenced by the Harley Lyrics. With both versions of **dolnik**, however, the language must conform to the meter, even allowing for the occasional two-syllable dip.

6. This study uses the words **beat** and **ictus** interchangeably in describing metrical rhythm, but the word **stress** describes the same phenomenon in speech or prose. This division is maintained to separate linguistic stress from metrical beat.

7. All lines represent what is in the manuscript; capricious spellings were quite common before the printing press, not least in application or omission of final *–e*. All historical final *–e*'s are accounted for in the scansions. The words, then, are the scribe's, but the scansions are the poet's.

Chapter 2:

Sir Gawain, *Piers Plowman*, and the Alliterative Long Line

I take *Gawain* as the classic example of fourteenth-century alliterative poetry. (Joan Turville-Petre, "The Metre of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," 313)

[A]ll of the alliterative poets except Langland wrote within a remarkably stable poetic. (Hoyt Duggan, "The Shape of the B-Verse," 569)

THE KNIGHT AND THE PLOWMAN

Perhaps the two alliterative poems that are most written about are *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Piers Plowman*; this fact is one justification for pairing them here to present an argument for the meter of the alliterative long line.[46] This combination is less quixotic than it may appear: the poems were written at almost the same time in a meter that is almost the same kind. In fact, it is quite common to find these two poems discussed together, though they are placed at opposite ends of the poetic spectrum, as the epigraphs highlight: both are praised for being metrical and literary *tours de force*, but whereas *Gawain* is placed firmly within the tradition of the alliterative long line and among the poems of the Alliterative Revival, *Piers* is firmly placed outside of it for metrical reasons.

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[46] All lines from *Gawain* are taken from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, rev. by Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967). All lines from *Piers Plowman* are taken from *Piers Plowman: The Prologue and Passus I-VII of the B Text as Found in Bodleian MS. Laud Misc. 581*, ed. by J. A. W. Bennett, ed (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

Marie Borroff's opening sentence in her seminal work on *Gawain* best captures the prevailing opinion: "This book is largely devoted to a single poem, one recognized as the masterpiece of a stylistic tradition."[47] It is, however, a problematic masterpiece, not least because it exists in a single manuscript, MS Cotton Nero A.x. The fact that we only have a single copy has raised valid questions concerning its ability to represent what the poet wrote, as opposed to what the scribe recorded (and perhaps rewrote), when there are no comparisons that can be made.[48] Some metrists argue that multiple witnesses can tell us more about the actual poem's meter and, by extension, the meter of the poems of the Alliterative Revival; these concerns will be addressed below. Concerning alliteration, it is much less regular than its sister poems, *Patience* and *Cleanness*. Ad Putter and Myra Stokes surmise "It may be that the poet allowed a greater diversity of alliterative patterns in *Gawain* than in *Patience* or *Cleanness* and permitted himself the kinds of patterns . . . common in rhymed and stanzaic alliterative verse."[49] Its meter also presents difficulties, especially in the first half-line or the a-verse. Here the relationship between meter and alliteration becomes quite sticky; the debate has moved back and forth as to whether the poet allows two or three metrical beats in the a-verse. This issue will be addressed in detail below.

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[47] Borroff, "Preface," xi in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study,* (New Haven, Yale UP, 1962).

[48] As Putter and Stokes observe: "The single manuscript in which these poems are preserved is not likely to be very far distant from the archetype, since it preserves a number of quite careful metrical-orthographic distinctions which would have been unlikely to survive frequent re-copying" (94) in "Spelling, Grammar and Metre in the Works of the *Gawain*-Poet," *Parergon*, 18 (2000), 77-95.

[49] The authors "found that in *Patience* and *Cleanness* the poet observes the AA/AX rule with so few exceptions that we have assumed lines not yielding it to be corrupt" (80).

Piers Plowman has gained a reputation for how different it appears to be. Of all poems written in the long, unrhymed Middle English alliterative line, only *Piers Plowman*, *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, and *Wars of Alexander* survive in more than one manuscript. *Piers Plowman* survives in fifty-four manuscripts and in three versions (A, B, and C),[50] while the latter two survive in two and nine manuscripts, respectively. Such an abundance of *Piers Plowman* copies has created concerns about authorship, authenticity, and order of manuscripts. In "Diuerse Copies Haue It Diuerselye'," Eric Dahl raises a number of questions about the assumption that all three versions were written by a single author: "If the A-text was the only version written by the original author, the entire corpus of *Piers Plowman* scholarship was perhaps focused on the wrong text" (75).[51] He assumes that the A-text is the Ur-text, though Jill Mann offers an interesting theory of the B-version as Ur-text in "The Power of the Alphabet."[52] As important as these concerns are, here they must remain peripheral here because they do not address meter.

The meter of *Piers Plowman* has caused many prosodists to question its relationship to the other unrhymed alliterative poems. Thomas Cable suggests that *Piers Plowman*'s prosody, while exhibiting in some lines the principles he has set forth, may ultimately "be shown to follow different rules" from the norm established in the other

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[50] Hoyt Duggan in the *Piers Plowman Electronic Archive* claims there are "fifty-four more or less complete surviving manuscripts" (http://www.tei-c.org/Applications/pi01.xml).

[51] "'Diuerse Copies Haue It Diuerselye': An Unorthodox Survey of Piers Plowman Textual Scholarship from Crowley to Skeat," in *'Suche Werkis to Werche': Essays on Piers Plowman in Honor of David C. Fowler*, ed. Míceál F. Vaughan (East Lansing, MI, Colleagues,1993), 53-80.

[52] Jill Mann, "The Power of the Alphabet: A Reassessment of the Relation between the A and the B Versions of Piers Plowman" *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 8 (1995), 21-50.

poems.[53] Duggan is less tentative; according to him, the poem cannot be made to fit the stress rules that he posits, and therefore does not belong in the alliterative tradition at all. He maintains that Langland himself eschewed adherence to a strict metrical norm and violated the rules followed by all the other poets who used this verse form. In fact, Duggan praises Langland for not following the rules: "Perhaps fortunately, Langland did not steadily adhere to the syntactic constraints that bound the other poets, demonstrating that the language at large permits composition of alliterative verse in patterns other than those actually used by the other poets."[54] Duggan indicates that Langland disregarded the metrical constraints of the tradition; he asserts that Langland ignored the form of Middle English alliterative verse, i.e., "constraints involving rhythmic, syntactic, and alliterative patterning."[55] Duggan's opinion implies that Langland is iconoclastic, and maybe an innovator.

But if *Piers* does not belong metrically with the poems of the Alliterative Revival, where does it belong? Langland did not write in the meters imported from the Continent, as his contemporary Chaucer did. And if *Gawain* is such a fine example of alliterative poetry, why has its meter proven so difficult to discern? A robust metrical theory must be able to accommodate both of these poems. In *The English Alliterative Tradition*, Cable establishes rules for the b-verse and a-verse that account for the meter we see in all of the unrhymed alliterative poems. In linking these two widely divergent poems metrically, this chapter will re-examine and add to Cable's rules for the a-verse and the b-

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[53] *The English Alliterative Tradition*, 86.
[54] "The Shape of the B-Verse in Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Speculum* 61.3 (1986), 564-592. 569.
[55] "Shape of the B-Verse," 578, n. 27.

verse. This chapter will demonstrate that these two poems belong to the same metrical tradition by applying Cable's rules in addition to elision and the newly discovered stress- and syllable-shift rules.

In scanning lines, it is easy to miss the poetry as one becomes focused on half-lines and syllables. The following chunks of poetry are offered to remind the reader of the rhythm of the two poems and to provide a launching point for discussion of the meter; all punctuation has been removed, and the a-verses have been divided from the b-verses. The scansions follow the principles argued in this chapter. Here are nine lines from *Piers*:

/ x / x x / x x / x x / x
Thanne gan I to meten a merueilouse sweuene

x x / x x / x x / x x x / x
That I was in a wildernesse wist I neuer where

x x x/ x x x / x / x x x / x
As I bihelde into þe est an hiegh to þe sonne

x x x / x x / / x x / x
I seigh a toure on a toft trielich ymaked

x / x / x x / x x / x x / x
A depe dale binethe a dongeon þereinne

x / x / x x / x x / x x / x
With depe dyches and derke and dredful of sight

x / / x x / / x x x / x
A faire felde ful of folke fonde I there bytwene

x x x / x x / x / x x / x
Of alle maner of men þe mene and þe riche

/ x x / x x x x / / x
Worchyng and wandryng as þe worlde asketh (*Piers* 11-19)

And here are nine lines from *Gawain*, scanned according to the same principles:

/ / x x / x x / x x x / x
Þus laykez þis lorde by lynde-wodez euez

x / x x / / x / x / x
And Gawayn þe god mon in gay bed lygez

/ x x x / / / x x x / x
Lurkezz quyl þe dayly3t lemed on þe wowes

x x / x x x / / x x x/ x
Vnder couertour ful clere cortyned aboute

x x x / x x x / / x x / x
And as in slomeryng he slode sle3ly he herde

x / x / x x / x / x x / x
A littel dyn at his dor and dernly vpon[56]

x x / x x x / / x x / x
And he heuez vp his hed out of þe cloþes

x / x x x / x / x x / x
A corner of þe cortyn he ca3t up a lyttel

x / x / x x x / x / x x / x
And waytez warly þiderwarde quat hit be my3t (*Gawain* 1178-86)

All nine a-verses and eight b-verses are regular; 1179b is unmetrical. These scansions will be discussed below.

[56] "*Vpon* is infin. depending on *herde*. For spelling with *v* cf. *vpon* adj. 'open,' *Pearl* 198, *Purity* [*Cleanness*] 318, 453." Note for line 1183, p. 108.

GAWAIN AND THE *GAWAIN*-POET'S DICTION

Although *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'s bobs-and-wheels have been largely neglected by metrists, quite a bit has been written on this poem's long lines. Tolkien and Gordon's edition devotes two pages to the meter of the long line and two pages to the alliterative patterning (and two-thirds of a page to the bobs and wheels as a whole). Their observations are standard textbook fare for describing the unrhymed alliterative long line: in sum, the line is the metrical unit, it is divided by a caesura, the poet used a varying system of beats and dips, and each half-line normally contains two beats each; the second half-line is often shorter than the first half-line, with the former having fewer variations and shorter dips than the latter.[57] The editors attempt to classify the lines into Sievers' system for Old English alliterative meter,[58] and then deliver an interesting observation about final *–e* in the poem, at least at the ends of b-verses: "Since the scribe can be seen to have written *–e* often where it was not historically in place, he may well have omitted it equally unhistorically."[59] The editors seem inclined to return final *–e* to its historical place, but do no more than observe that "there is a strong predominance of 'feminine endings' in *Gawain* as in most alliterative poems."[60] The editors accept and describe without comment the three-beat a-verses that have vexed other metrists.

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[57] Tolkien, et al., pp. 147-152, esp. 148.

[58] The Sievers' system divides Old English alliterative half-lines into five rhythmic types; although imperfect, it has remained the standard system of classification.

[59] *ibid*. 148

[60] Tolkien, et al., explain that poems such as *The Wars of Alexander* and *Destruction of Troy* have a number of lines with masculine endings (149). Luick chose the latter poem as the vehicle for his hypothesis that the b-verses required a final, unaccented *–e*, so the discrepancy is interesting; the meter of *Troy* will be discussed in a later chapter.

Marie Borroff 's 1962 study, which remains the benchmark not only for work on *Gawain* but for the insight she consequently provides into the poems of the Alliterative Revival, presents a strong but inherently flawed argument about the meter of *Gawain*, particularly with regard to final *–e*. She argues against the presence of final *–e* in both the poet's spoken and poetic dialects because she does not separate the two; she is more comfortable aligning the poet's dialect as written on the page with *Cursor Mundi*, which was written in the same region but at least fifty years before *Gawain*, than with the London poets.

In light of the importance of final *–e* in distinguishing Cable's theory from Duggan's—Cable thinks it must be there, whereas Duggan considers it optional—scholarship on final *–e* in recent years has confirmed that Cable's rule for the b-verse best captures how the poets wrote. Putter and Stokes reveal an avoidance of masculine b-verse endings in *Gawain* most elegantly through the poet's use of *were* and not *watz* at line ends; such evidence reveals that *were* remained a disyllable, at least in the poetic diction of the alliterative long line.[61] Nevertheless, they conclude: "For the *Gawain*-poet . . . sounding of final *–e* within and at the end of the line appears to have been a matter of metrical convenience" (94). Because we can assume that poets choose convenient forms, the question is which convenient forms the poet had available. Putter and Stokes are cautious in their conclusions.

[61] Putter and Stokes, 92.

It is notable, then, that five years later Judith Jefferson and Ad Putter made a more decisive claim about the status of final *–e* in the *Gawain*-poet's meter.[62] Their work on infinitives in *–e* and *–en* in all four of the poems establishes that final *–e* on infinitives is syllabic (and elidable), and that the poet alternated the *–e* and *–en* doublet with an eye toward maintaining long and short dips; they are more positive about this regulation of dip length in the b-verse than the a-verse. They also show that the scribe paid attention to these spellings, thus proving that the extant manuscript is not far removed from the author's.[63] They hesitate to confirm that either Duggan or Cable's rule for the b-verse is the right one, though they lean more toward Cable's version: "the voicing of *–e* in infinitives should not be thought of merely as an additional exception to the rule that final *–e* was insignificant but as an indication that no such rule ever existed in alliterative verse."[64] The flaw they see in Cable's theory is that he prohibits elision, and they quite rightly remain dubious about such an apparently absolute statement.[65]

Putter, Stokes, and Jefferson appear to be the only metrists who have tested Duggan's theory that final *–e* is optional and Cable's theory that final *–e* remained syllabic in the alliterative long line, as did other etymological endings such as *–liche*. For Cable, it is of little concern that these endings had almost certainly been eroded in the poet's spoken English, because the meter shows that the endings were still available,

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[62] Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter, 'The Distribution of Infinitives in *–e* and *–en* in Some Middle English Alliterative Poems', *Medium Ævum,* 74 (2005), 221-47. They demonstrate that the *Gawain*-poet paid attention to the same metrical concerns of dips and elision that Chaucer did.

[63] In note 40, Jefferson and Putter make a convincing argument for *Gawain*'s having a longer history of scribal transmission, based on spelling.

[64] Jefferson and Putter 242.

[65] Note 5 on p. 243 points out how Duggan's views of final *–e* have changed, and how he has not himself acknowledged these changes.

much as they were for the London poets. Yet Putter, Stokes, and Jefferson have been rightly cautious about the territory they have been willing to stake out for the existence of syllabic final *–e*: Cable's rules have not been well received, and in some instances his theories have been misunderstood. He has never denied the possibility of elision; he simply did not use it in developing his theories for *The English Alliterative Tradition*. In order to be consistent, he avoided the possibility of elision because its flexibility might have biased the evidence in the first sweep through the text in the attempt to establish a metrical norm.[66] He is aware of this enforced rigidity, however, and has left the door open for patterns of final *–e* to be "made more definite still."[67] If final *–e* is elidable, then it must be syllabic: his argument has always been that final *–e* exists in these poems at least at the systematic phonological level, whether or not the poets employed elision and other tightening measures at the phonetic level.

This chapter argues that the *Gawain*-poet's unrhymed alliterative long lines follow the conservative rules of historical final *-e* described by Cable. In addition, the scansions in this chapter acknowledge that the *Gawain*-poet used many of the same word-tightening measures evidenced in the template meters, most obviously elision. The most basic claim that this chapter seeks to establish is that the a-verse is fundamentally different from the b-verse; in other words, the alliterative poets sought asymmetry in the lines. Simply put, the b-verse rhythm, about which we know so much more, cannot have an a-verse rhythm, and vice versa. Using 353 long lines of *Gawain* (1126-1552, omitting

[66] *The English Alliterative Tradition* 79.
[67] *The English Alliterative Tradition* 82.

bobs and wheels) and according to rules elaborated below, almost 97% of the lines of this poem are regular; only 9 b-verses (2.5%) and 15 a-verses (4%) are unmetrical.

PIERS AND LANGLAND'S LANGUAGE

As stated above, the received opinion concerning Langland is that he followed different rules. Part of that is his use of final *–e*: "most scholars assume that it had ceased to be used in alliterative poetry."[68] In discussing how the alliterative poets used final *–e*, Duggan exempts Langland from the norms of alliterative language and thus meter: "one exceptional poet, Langland, . . . *did* sound final *–e*s, his language being in this and other respects 'a good bit more conservative than that of any of the other alliterative poets."[69] Ironically, the sheer wealth of extant manuscripts has proven more of a hindrance than a help in determining Langland's metrical choices; in their edition of the B-version, George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson advance an already corrupt B archetype to explain the looseness and indeterminateness of the lines.[70] These editors assume an endemic corruption that gives license to a freer hand in an editing process based largely on alliteration.[71] The question, then, is how we can find the rules Langland followed. M. L. Samuels observes in his study of Langland's dialect that "we normally assume, as a sound critical canon, that poetic practices are founded on a natural and

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[68] Jefferson and Putter, 225. They note that Cable argues the opposite case.

[69] Cited in Jefferson and Putter, 225, emphasis theirs, from "Langland's Dialect and Final *–e*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 12 (1990), 157-91. Jefferson and Putter disagree with Duggan and consider Langland's use of final *–e* similar to that of the other alliterative poets.

[70] Kane, George, ed., and Donaldson, E. Talbot, ed. *Piers Plowman: The B Version: Will's Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best*. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 136.

[71] Kane and Donaldson, 136, where they find almost a third of the lines to be scribal, not original. The problems of their approach, which had the misfortune of preceding Cable and Duggan's independent discoveries of the b-verse meter, will be addressed in a section on editing practices and their implications in the conclusion.

consistent linguistic system, and that any additions of mixtures must have special justification."[72]

The answer lies within the knowledge base of the poet himself. Duggan admires the high level of education that Langland's verse reveals: "it is probable that Langland is the most 'literate' of the alliterative poets. The high art of his alliterative verse is related to but perhaps essentially different from that of his contemporaries."[73] Kane and Donaldson note that Langland's English is not much different from contemporary London English,[74] and allow the possibility that his literary English was "adventitious, compromising between alliterative convenience and an aim of general intelligibility not always characteristic of alliterative poets."[75] Langland wrote for an educated middle and upper class audience who understood and appreciated this language, if the number of extant manuscripts is any indication.

Duggan demonstrates, however, that the A, B, and C versions are consistent enough intertextually to disallow any claim of corruption, though he agrees with Kane and Donaldson on the form of the line: "Alliteration, considered in relation to the pause or caesura of the line, appears to be the only determinable organic principle" of Langland's prosody.[76] Prior to Cable's publication of data supporting the importance of final *–e* in Middle English alliterative verse, Samuels argued its importance in *Piers Plowman* in achieving hemistichs that are long enough to fit recognized metrical patterns:

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[72] "Langland's Dialect," *Medium Aevum* 54.2 (1985), 232-247. 234.
[73] "The Shape of the B-Verse" 577-8.
[74] Samuels remarks that Langland's "dialect remained basically Malvern throughout; the fact that he used lexis for a London audience and excluded specifically Western words is really a separate matter" (237).
[75] Kane and Donaldson, 215, n. 181.
[76] Kane and Donaldson, 131, n. 7.

"Langland must have made at least some use of grammatical final *–e*."[77] Although this study has found Bennett's *Visio*[78] more useful than the Athlone edition, it is worth noting Kane and Donaldson's rationale for their choice of Trinity College Ms. B.15.17, or W:

> In adopting W as our basic text we do not, of course, propose that its careful handling of final *–e* . . . bears any necessary relation to Langland's spoken practice . . . . But if the phonetic value of final *–e* in *Piers Plowman* is ever determined this will be from manuscripts like W where the letter is seldom omitted when it has either ascertainable grammatical function or historical sanction, and seldom added when it has neither.[79]

In fact, both L and W provide metrical readings, more so than the Athlone edition.

The evidence of this chapter demonstrates that not only did Langland use a discernable meter, but more particularly that his poetry is regular and belongs in the Alliterative Revival. As with *Gawain*, this study has applied Ten Brink's rules for elision to the scansions of *Piers*. Applying this phonology to Langland's verse significantly decreases the number of unmetrical lines. In the 548 a-verses, 92% of the a-verses are metrical, and in the 552 b-verses, 94% fit within the metrical norm.[80] More specifically, 91% of the a-verses and 95% of the b-verses in the Prologue are metrical, while 93% of the a-verses and 93% of the b-verses in Passus VI are metrical.

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[77] Samuels 244.
[78] Bennett's *Visio* is based on Bodleian MS. Laud Misc. 581 known as the "L" manuscript.
[79] Kane and Donaldson, 215-216, n. 184.
[80] This number excludes the roughly fourteen lines composed in Latin: twelve a- and eleven b-verses in the Prologue, and five a-verses and one b-verse in Passus VI; I have rounded all percentages to the nearest whole number.

THE RHYTHM OF THE B-VERSE REVISITED

Chapter 1 provides the history of Duggan and Cable's independent discoveries of the rhythm underlying the b-verse; it is not necessary to repeat it here. The two theories are almost identical: both agree that the b-verse had a strict meter hitherto unnoticed. Cable's observations, however, as fully described in *The English Alliterative Tradition,* rest on a consistent application of rules to each side of the caesura, with the result offering a look into the shape of the a-verse, too. Duggan offers an accurate model of the b-verse.[81] The point where his model differs from Cable's is the final unaccented syllable concerning historical final *-e,* which he argues *can* be there, while Cable argues it *must* be there. Such a difference in reading a line is important; in pointing out erratic scribal dropping of historical final *–e*, Cable shows that the looks of the lines are deceptive. These rules can be extended to the a-verse, the heavier and more problematic hemistich. Thus, Cable's rules are more useful to understanding the prosody of the line as a whole.

Since Cable's rules are the ones used here, it makes sense to define them first. The b-verse must have exactly two beats, one long dip, and a final, unaccented syllable; a short dip consisting of one unaccented syllable either before or in between the two stresses is optional. A long dip consists of two or more unaccented syllables; a short dip is a single unaccented syllable. The b-verse can be described thus:

[81] Duggan is able to propose three separate frames for the b-verse but no viable structure for the a-verse, which he leaves as "far more flexible" ("Shape of the B-Verse" 571).

(x) / x x (x) (x) / x

x x (x) (x) / (x) / x

The parenthetical **x**'s are optional syllables; the rest is required of the b-verse. In the b-verse, words can be demoted to a heavy, unaccented position when the meter requires it. In essence, then, the b-verse has a definite deductive aspect, in that the rhythm can be predicted once the length of the first dip is known; however, it remains inductive because its pattern cannot be predicted beforehand. Its deductive aspects as seen in its stricter patterns readily surface in the kinds of massive corpora studies computers have made possible, even when the input differs, say, with regard to final *-e*; significantly, the relative ease that Duggan and Cable found in discerning its shape, as opposed to the a-verse rhythm, demonstrates how much more it resembles alternating meters.[82]

The b-verse has been tested exhaustively, and there is admittedly very little to add. The basic pattern Cable and Duggan discerned has been accepted long enough for inclusion in the third edition of *A Book of Middle English*, though the editors preferred Duggan's more conservative approach to final *–e*.[83] But recent studies have so far favored Cable's approach, as described above. The only meaningful addition to current b-verse theory that this study can offer is a demonstration of elision in both *Gawain* and *Piers*. In the former, we can learn how elision solves the problem of a surfeit of syllables

[82] It was and is also important that the b-verse meter juggles fewer components, so the probability of discovering its meter was higher. The most reduced b-verse has two beats, one long dip, and one final short dip, so four components of two each. The a-verse has a much larger variety of patterns and thus a greater number of possible components; both the variety and usually higher number of syllables accounts for the sense that it is the weightier of the two half-lines.

[83] "If there is a dip at the end of the line it is always weak." J.A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre, *A Book of Middle English*, 3rd ed, (Maldon, MA, Blackwell, 2005), 60.

while still accounting for final *–e*; in the latter, we can find proof that this seemingly recalcitrant poem regularly follows the same rules, if slightly less often.

Gawain offers a small number of b-verses made metrical by elision, of which the following are a sample; the symbol • indicates the elided syllable:

x x / x • / x
1243b as ȝe reherce here[84]

x x / • x / x
1389b as he couþe awyse:

Most often, though, elision merely tightens up dips. In the lines scanned for this study, the number of metrical b-verses with three-syllable dips is seventy-eight or roughly 23%, and the number of four-syllable dips is eleven or about 3%; there are no dips longer than four syllables.[85] And these numbers may be higher than what the poet intended, if he allowed for syncope and apocope. First, here is an example that shows he used the more conservative of the *than*/*thanne* syllabic doublet:

x x / x / x
1442b þenne greued mony

In the preceding b-verse, the older form is preferred to fulfill the demands of the meter; the same is true is 1340b, 1353b, 1383b, 1454b, and 1489b, where *þenne* ends the b-verse. The newer, apocopated form is required in the following b-verse:

x / x x / x
1218b þen leue me grante,

[84] It is arguable that the final *–e* on *reherce* had already been lost.

[85] In the sample of 353 lines, the eleven half-lines with four-syllable dips are 1152b, 1187b, 1229b, 1276b, 1335b, 1342b, 1372b, 1414b, 1446b, 1479b, and 1528b. Some of these may have apocopated syllabic doublets, in these cases *–ly*/*liche* and *al*/*alle*, but the following do not: 1187b, 1276b (if the *–ed* on *waled* is pronounced), 1414b, and 1479b. Longer dips provide a stronger contrast to the dolnik in the wheel lines.

Similarly, there is evidence that the poet used syncope, which is most easily seen at the end of the b-verse, where there can only be one unstressed syllable:

x / x x / x
1218b and let as hym wondered

In the previous line, either the past tense inflection *–ed* ending or the second syllable of the root word *–er* has been syncopated; in the following example, the poet chooses the monosyllabic form from the *or*/*other* syllabic doublet:

x / x x / x
1255b oþer golde þat þay hauen;

The poet also exploited stress doublets available in words adopted from French, as the examples below reveal; as before, the symbol • indicates a silenced syllable.

x x / / x
1168b at þe resayt, [*reception*]

x x / x / x
1300 bi his courtaysye,

x / x x / x
1320 at hyndeȝ barayne; [*hinds, barren*]

In the three preceding b-verses, the poet exploits the stress shift by the same means that the London poets would. These examples reinforce the rich evidence of doublet use in the wheels and *Pearl*'s meter.

William Langland makes far greater use of elision in the b-verses, which reduces *Piers*' famously long lines quite a bit. The following are a sampling; as before, the symbol • indicates a silenced syllable:

x x x / • x / x
Pr.38b I nel nought preue it here

• x / x x / x
Pr.110b þe eleccioun bilongeth

x • / x x x / x
VI.118b by þe ordre þat I bere

x x / • x / x
VI.225 þat þow myȝte asspye

Such examples are, in fact, very easy to find. In *Piers*, 194 metrical b-verses or roughly 37% have a three-syllable dip, thirty or 6% have a four-syllable dip, and two have a five-syllable dip; there are no dips longer than five syllables.

Much like the *Gawain*-poet, Langland probably exploited the stress and syllabic doublets uniquely available to poets of this time. Here are some examples:

/ xx / x
Pro.35b Iudas children

This example shows that the historical genitive is Iudases, and the final –es is pronounced to create a long dip.

x / x x / x
Pro.53b with hoked staues

This example shows that adjectival participles have a final, syllabic –e.

x • / x x x / x
VI.194b were botened a þousande

In the preceding line, the b-verse is made metrical by using the apocopated form of *were*.

x • / x x / x
VI.130b suche sikenesse vs eyleth

The preceding line and VI.325b probably use the apocopated, newer form of *suche*.

x / x x / • x
VI.89b þat best hath yserued it

In the preceding line, the poet probably used the syncopated form of *yserued* to meet the demand of the meter. The stress doublets are also in evidence:

x / x x x x x / x
Pr.193 he coueiteth nouȝt owre caroyne [*body*]

In the preceding line, the stress shifts on the word *caroigne* (< ONF *caronië*), which is our modern word *carrion*. The following line shows the same kind of end-of-verse stress shift:

x / x x x / x
Pr.228 and red wyn of Gascoigne[86]

Stress shifts can happen on other words adopted from French:

x / x x / x
VI.128b ȝowre grayne multiplye

Finally, Langland plays with the penultimate beat of the b-verse in the fashion that first suggested to metrists that the London poets (and the *Gawain*-poet in the wheel lines) preferred feminine endings:

x x x x / x / x
VI.77b I shulde nouȝte dele with hem

/ x x x / x
VI.126b lorde, ygraced be ȝe

In sum, the b-verses manifestly demonstrate two poets in complete control of the meter.

The unmetrical b-verses deserve some attention. In most cases, the problem is too many syllables, but several are lacking syllables. The b-verses listed below may be rhetorically justified:

[86] The alliterating stave is <w>; the beat falls on *red* and not *wine* because it is in contrast to the *white wine* in the a-verse. Such patterns of alliteration deserve fuller treatment than can be offered here.

x / x / x
1141b þre bare mote

Arguably, this b-verse could mimic the three long notes indicated in the words rather than the scansion offered. 1158b perhaps displays the same kind of playfulness:

x / x /
1158b with hay! and war![87]

There are no similar explanations, however, for 1126b, 1179b, 1183b, 1221b, and 1293b, which also lack the required single strong dip. Only 1543b has too many syllables, and 1273b ends in a French-derived word, *semblaunt*, that should not occur at the end of b-verses, as argued below.

In *Piers*, the problem is much more often too many syllables, which creates a second and unmetrical long dip: Pr.56b, Pr. 70b, Pr.79b, Pr. 84b, Pr. 131b, Pr.160b, Pr. 175b, Pr. 186b, Pr.200b, Pr.202b, VI.3b, VI.7b, VI.16b, VI.20b, VI.24b, VI.28b, VI.32b, VI.69b, VI.81b, VI.86b, VI.91b, VI.92b, VI.149b, VI.151b, VI.153b (and this b-verse ends in a word that is unmetrical, *certeyne*), VI.198b, VI.260b, VI.272b, VI.308, and VI.325. Only Pr.182b has too few syllables.

[87] This line may not be authentic; cf. 1445b, "ful hiȝe and hay! hay! cryed," where it is used twice.

THE RHYTHMS OF THE A-VERSE

In contrast to the b-verse, there is still much unresolved concerning the a-verse, and therefore quite a lot of territory to cover. From Duggan's very loose rules that describe the a-verse as simply "more flexible" than the b-verse to Noriko Inoue's strict and complicated Caesura and Spacing Rules, the proposed theories run the gamut. It is frustrating indeed that Middle English alliterative metrics has been unable to progress beyond confirming one of two competing theories about the b-verse proposed twenty years ago, but a large part of the problem lies in the variability of the a-verse itself. Based on the success of Cable's b-verse rules in predicting the smaller range of patterns we find in the b-verse, this study has applied his a-verse rules to the same group of lines from *Gawain* and *Piers*. Whereas in the previous section, such a decision required very little defense, here it is necessary to provide one. It would be illogical, after all, to assume that if his b-verse rules work, so must his a-verse rules. This section will establish how *Gawain* and *Piers* demonstrate the usefulness of Cable's rules; a discussion of the permissibility of the three-beat a-verse will be presented as a conclusion to this chapter.

In *The English Alliterative Tradition*, Cable establishes a two-prong rule for metrical a-verses:

1. If there are two beats, then there must be at least two long dips.

2. If there are three beats, then there can be any number of dips of any kind.[88]

Following in the footsteps of many metrists, Cable calls the first group *normal* and the second group *extended*. This division is flawed for two reasons: if we accept that three-beat a-verses exist, "extended" is an inaccurate word for them. In most cases, in fact, the longest lines have only two metrical beats, so having an extra beat extends nothing. This study, therefore, rejects the word *extended* and replaces it with *heavy*; *light* and *heavy* are words metrists use to describe alliterative patterns, and Chaucer's decasyllables are considered *lighter* than Shakespeare's iambic pentameter, so it seems natural to adopt these neutral words for describing this metrical phenomenon.[89] The larger problem, though, is that *normal* creates the assumption that lines that do not follow this format are somehow abnormal. Rather, if we accept that the three-beat and two-beat lines coexist as metrical animals, it is inaccurate to call one *normal*. Both Langland and the *Gawain*-poet use three-beat or heavy a-verses in a significant minority of lines: of the lines scanned for this study, *Piers* contains 188 heavy a-verses in the sample of 546 a-verses, or 34%, and *Gawain* contains 121 heavy a-verses from a sample size of 353, or 34%.

The approximately two-thirds of the a-verses that have two beats merit discussion first. No one debates the metricality of a two-beat a-verse, but Cable is the only metrist

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[88] *English Alliterative Tradition*, 92. Only Duggan has acknowledged the second part of Cable's rule; other scholars have ignored it.

[89] Joan Turville-Petre refers to these a-verse as "crowded," a term that better captures the fact that they are no longer than the standard verses but have at least three alliterating staves. Her terminology, while also more accurate, carries a negative connotation, a claim supported by her rejection of these lines as metrically bearing three points of ictus. "The Metre of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." *English Studies* 57 (1976), 310-28.

who has argued that two-beat a-verses must have *two* strong dips, not just one. He has recently modified his theory of the a-verse to include two-beat a-verses that end on strong syllables or long dips; neither one of these features occurs at the end of the b-verse.[90] This addition to his theory merely reinforces and refines his fundamental argument for asymmetry between the two half-lines, which the present study demonstrates is the best explanation for what we see in the a-verse.

This study has found 96% of the a-verses in *Gawain* and 92% of the a-verses from *Piers* to be metrical. Partly as a result of accepting three-beat a-verses as metrical, I have found only two a-verses to have a five-syllable dip in *Gawain* and only four in *Piers*; there are no dips of greater length in either.[91] The following examples will demonstrate why the two-beat a-verse must have either two long dips or end in a long dip or strong syllable. The first examples will be a-verses that require no explanation, which will be followed by a-verses that are made metrical by applying final *–e* and the possible *–n* on the infinitive.[92] The final examples will deal with the recent modification to the theory. The lines from *Gawain* will be simply numbered, whereas the lines from *Piers*

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[90] Thomas Cable, "Middle English Meter as Illustrated by *Cleanness*," manuscript. Putter and Jefferson have independently discovered this feature of the a-verse, what they refer to as the "long or heavy final dip," though they remain proponents of the single long dip: "The a-verse must contain at least one long dip, and its syllabic structure must be dissimilar from that of the b-verse in one of two ways. Either it must contain an extra-long dip (four or more unstressed syllables) or a long or heavy final dip (a heavy dip consisting of a syllable with secondary stress, not permitted in the b-verse)" (21). In Ad Putter, "Chaucer's Verse and Alliterative Poetry: Grammar, Metre, and Some Secrets of the Syllable Count," *Poetica* 67 (2007), 19-35.

[91] The lines are 1295a, 1529a, Pr.179a, VI.53a, VI.251a, and VI.293a. VI.251a could easily have four ictuses, so it probably does not belong here. I include it because of scansions I offer for compounds below.

[92] Jefferson and Putter demonstrate the *Gawain*-poet's use of the two possible forms of the infinitive; G. V. Smithers has found the same alternation in *Havelok the Dane*. G. V. Smithers, "The Scansion of *Havelok* and the Use of ME *–en* and *–e* in *Havelok* and by Chaucer," in *Middle English Studies Presented to Norman Davis in Honour of his Seventieth Birthday,* ed. Douglas Gray and E. G. Stanley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 195-234.

will indicate whether they are from the Prologue or Passus VI; the symbol • indicates an elided syllable:

x x / x x x / x
1128a And þay busken up bilyue

x x x / • x x / x
1198a Bot ȝet he sayde in hymself

x x / x x / x
Pr.7a I was wery forwandred

x x x / x x x x / x
VI.27a And oþer laboures do for þi loue

The previous examples require no explanation, though they have been scanned with final *–e* in mind. The following scansions are made metrical by the rules that the London poets followed, rules that exploit stress and syllabic doublets that existed in the language. These are the rules that Cable describes in *The English Alliterative Tradition* and that both he and I have applied to both half-lines:

/ x x x / x x
Pro.40a Bidderes and beggeres

This example shows that plural nouns that do not end in eCe in their base form have a syllabic plural morpheme; in this case, the base nouns are bidder and begger, so they do not have a final –e in their root form. Marie Borroff argues that this final *–es* was not heard, since it does not follow a stressed syllable.[93] At least in Piers Plowman, counting this morpheme as a syllable contributes to making many of the lines, such as the previous one, metrical.

[93] Borroff 143.

x x / x / x x
1191a and ho stepped stilly

x x x / • x / x x
Pr.150a And ouerlepe hem lyȝtlich

x x x / x / x x
VI.23a Ac on þe teme trewly

In Pr.150a, the syllabic doublet *–liche* makes this a-verse metrical. Similar lines in *Gawain* alone are 1133a, 1190a, 1253a, 1341a, 1364a, 1366a, 1391a, 1469a, and 1480a; significantly, elision can work in tandem with this historical ending:

x x / x• x / x
1299a Couth not lyȝly haf lenged

There are other examples of final *–e* that make the line metrical. In the following line, the superlative form is nominalized and thus has a final *-e*:

/ x x x / x x
1130a Richen hem þe rychest

Syllables syncopated by the scribe can be expanded:

/ x x / x x
1129a Tyffen her takles

Participles used as adjectives and nouns gain a final *–e*:

x / x x x x / x x
1170a þe ledeȝ were so lerned

x / x x x / x x
Pr.10a I slombred in a slepyng

Adjectives used in the substantive receive a final *–e*:

x / x x x / x x
1268a 'Bi Mary,' quoþ þe menskful

x / x x x / x x
VI.15a þe nedy and þe naked

The verb form *hade* is regularly disyllabic:

x x x / x x / x
1412a Bi þat þe coke hade crowen

Infinitives could have *–en* as an ending:[94]

/ x x x / x x
Pr.154a Cracche vs or clowe vs

In the preceding example, adding the historical *–n* to these infinitives provides the required second long dip.

So far, the a-verses presented have simply realized rules that other metrists have argued or could have argued based on current theories of the a-verse. The rest of the chapter deals with new rules for the a-verse that affect both the two-beat version that everyone accepts is metrical, and the heavy a-verses, which have not enjoyed such acceptance as metrical entities.[95] Cable's recent discoveries deal specifically with the final syllable of the a-verse, but these realizations have an effect on the rhythm of the a-verse as a whole; these recent additions to his theory mirror the implications that the required final, unstressed syllable on the b-verse created for final *–e* in the meter. The two-beat and heavy a-verses are treated separately below in order to develop the argument starting from a point of agreement, the two-beat version, but this separation is artificial, as should become evident as the argument progresses.

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[94] Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter, "The Distribution of Infinitives"

[95] Challenges to Duggan and Cable's assumption that the a-verse can have more than two beats, and that the alliterative line can have more than four points of ictus are dealt with below.

These recent discoveries are realizations of Cable's 1985 claim that the a-verse cannot be like the b-verse.[96] His articulation of this difference, as summarized above, envisions the a-verse as heavier than the b-verse: not one long dip but two; not two beats but three. This conception of the a-verse could be considered a "greater than" version because the rules are for a-verses that are longer and semantically weightier than the b-verses. The new discoveries capture "less than" a-verses, which simply do not have enough syllables to meet the b-verse criteria, and "not equal to" a-verses, which superficially look like b-verses but end on syllables not allowed at the end of the b-verse. A number of "less than" a-verses have two beats but are missing the required long dip or feminine ending. The smallest group of these a-verses lack a long dip and thus evidence in isolation the rhythms the London poets were developing[97]:

	x / x / x
1187a	Hit watz þe ladi[98]

The rarity of this rhythm serves the rhetorical purpose of emphasizing the entrance of a character as monstrous in her own way as her husband, whose gruesome challenge to Arthur's court as the Green Knight sends Gawain on his journey. The effect is stunning, and the poet here demonstrates his deft handling of one way an a-verse rhythm can differ

[96] Putter and Judith Jefferson have independently discovered these rules, but their rules only allow for a two-beat a-verse. See "Chaucer's Verse and Alliterative Poetry," especially 21.

[97] Putter (2007) argues that "alliterative metre could justly be described as *anti-iambic*" and argues that the two meters developed in opposition (30). If patterns like x / x / x can be established as metrical for the a-verse by virtue of being unmetrical for the b-verse, the implications should be compared with Putter's theory that "iambic patterns are outlawed" in the a-verse (29).

[98] Cable argues that it is possible that *ladi* (< OE *hlæfdíʒe*) was trisyllabic, / x x, which would still make this a non-b-verse pattern. *Lady* ends three b-verses in this 353-line sample (1208b, 1248b, and 1299b), which the similar historically disyllabic *–liche* does not.

from a b-verse rhythm. In the roughly 900 a-verses scanned for this study, the only other example of this rhythm is uttered by the lady:

x / x / x
1297a So god as Gawayn

With these words, the lady initiates the kissing challenge that ultimately results in blemishing Gawain both physically and morally. This shift to a rhythm so rare could underscore the shift from light-hearted flirting to serious seduction.[99] Langland does not use this rhythm in the lines scanned for this study.

The more common minimal a-verses, though still rare, have masculine endings and thus do not have a b-verse rhythm; this rhythm is illustrated below. The symbol • is once again used to indicate an elided syllable:

/ x x x • /
1326a Serched hem at þe asay

x / x x x /
1379a How payez yow þis play

x / x x x x /
1448a þat buskkez after þis bor

x / x x x /
1466a He rechated and rode

x / x x x /
1245a By God I were glad

/ x x x • /
1326a Serched hem at þe asay

[99] These contextual arguments differ from the contextual ones above which dealt with unmetrical b-verses in the same rhythm, because this a-verse is metrical. x / x / x is a legitimate a-verse pattern used by this poet, though rare; for example *Cleanness* 1315a: Such god, such gounes. In other words, context does not account for the metricality; it simply adds a layer of interest.

	x / x x x /
1379a	How payez yow þis play
	x / x x x x /
1448a	þat buskkez after þis bor
	x / x x x /
1466a	He rechated and rode
	x / x x x /
Pr.48a	Thei went forth in here wey
	x x x / /
Pr.52a	More þan to sey soth
	/ x x x x /
Pr.53a	Heremites on an heep
	x / x x x x /
Pr.79a	His seel shulde nouȝt be sent
	x / x x x x /
Pr.100a	I parceyued of þe power
	x / x x x /
Pr.124a	And knelyng to þe kyng
	x x / x /
Pr.171a	Where he ritt or rest
	x x x / x /
VI.283a	Ne neyther gees ne grys
	x x x / /
VI.283a	þanne was folke fayne
	x / x x x x /
VI.317a	He greueth hym aȝeines God

The third category of minimal a-verses contains those that look like b-verses, but they end in words with potential stress shift. Such words, mostly from Anglo-Norman

and Old French, were exploited as stress doublets by the London poets and by the *Gawain*-poet in *Pearl* and the bobs and wheels at line ends. In *Gawain*, the word that most obviously undergoes stress shift in the wheel lines is, ironically, *Gawain*, which is the Celtic name *Gavin*.[100] It is not surprising, then, that this fact makes 1293a, 1383a, and 1498a metrical:

	x x / x / x	
1293a	Bot þat ȝe be Gawan	
	x x x / x / x	
1383a	and al I gif yow Gawayn,	
	x x / x / x	
1498a	ȝe be God quoþ Gawayn,	

Although it could be argued that the stress *should* be shifted on these scansions to provide a second long dip, such shifts need to be proven to take place in this inductive meter.[101] The shift, after all, is a feature of deductive meter, of the alternating meter of the London poets' octosyllables and decasyllables. It is safer to think of these syllables not as recipients of secondary stress, which will be discussed below, but rather as words with potential stress that do not receive linguistic stress in this inductive meter, but which could receive stress in the deductive meters. Here are more examples of such lines:

	x / x x x / x	
1185a	A corner of þe cortyn[102]	(< OF. *cortine*, *courtine*)
	/ x x / x	
1254a	Keuer hem comfort	(< OF. *cunfort*, *confort*)

[100] Please see Chapter 4 for evidence of this phenomenon.
[101] A way to explain this would be to mark the caesura, but a feminine ending on an a-verse is acceptable.
[102] See also 1192a and 1496a.

	x / x xx x / x	
1278a	and soberly your seruaunt	(< OF. *servant*)
	x / x x x / x	
1344a	So ryde þay of by resoun	(< OF. *reisun,*)

The following examples demonstrate the same phenomenon in *Piers*:

	x x / x / x	
Pr.1a	In a somer seson	(< OF. *seson, seison*)
	x / x x x x / x	
Pr.29a	And coueiten nought in contre	(< OF. *cuntrée*)
	x / x / x x x	
Pr.99a	Lest Crist in constorie	(< ONF. *consistorie*)
	x / x x / x	
Pr.158a	A raton of renon	(<AF. *renoun, renun*)
	x / x x x / x	
Pr.217a	I seiȝ in þis assemble	(< OF. *a(s)semblee*)
	x / x / x	
VI.74a	And frere þe faytoure	(< AN. *faitour*)
	/ x / x	
VI.167a	Warned Wastoure	(< AN. *wastere, -our*)
	x / x / x x	
VI.190a	An heep of heremites	(< OF. *(h)ermite,*)
	x • x x / / x	
VI.202a	þanne hadde peres pite	(< AN. *pité*)
	x / • x x / x	
VI.257a	For somme of my seruauntz	(< OF. *servant*)
	x x / / x	
VI.257a	Lat nouȝt sire Surfait	(< OF. *surfait*)
	x / • x x x / x	
VI.321a	Ne stryue aȝeines his statut	(< OF. *statut*)

All of the preceding a-verses demonstrate that a metrical a-verse must simply be different from a metrical b-verse; unmetrical a-verses, then, look like b-verses. Four percent of the a-verses in *Gawain* and 8% in *Piers* are unmetrical. In *Gawain*, these lines are 1152a, 1178a, 1231a, 1294a, 1295a, 1298a, 1307a, 1345a, 1406a, 1424a, and 1548a. In *Piers*, the unmetrical a-verse in the Prologue are 2a, 6a, 8a, 27a, 37a, 56a, 58a, 59a, 61a, 69a, 70a, 91a, 104a, 127a, 130a, 131a, 169a, 210a, 211a, and 227a; and in Passus VI, the unmetrical a-verses are 10a, 16a, 19a, 28a, 31a, 37a, 41a, 55a, 61a, 62a, 94a, 121a, 128a, 143a, 187a, 191a, 208a, 218a, 219a, 223a, 226a, 228a, and 235a.

The final a-verse that requires mention here comes from *Gawain*:

	x x x x / /
1137a	By þat any dayly3t

This a-verse is unusual because it combines the features "masculine ending" and "not a b-verse rhythm" argued above with a new one, "ends on a strong syllable." This latter requirement that creates asymmetry plays a large role in the argument below. In the compound *dayly3t*, we can see why two-beat and heavy a-verses belong in the same and not different categories.

HALF-LINE ASYMMETRY AND THE THREE-BEAT A-VERSE

Despite the fact that this study argues explicitly that it is false to separate the a-verse into its two-beat and three-beat formations, given that both meet the basic requirement of asymmetry, it is necessary to state the defense of that argument separately here. By the consistent application of the methods argued in this chapter, this study has found that three-beat or heavy a-verses make up a solid third of the metrical a-verses in both *Gawain* and *Piers*, which is a significant component of an argument to prove their metricality. But such evidence has never before sufficed, nor has the extra flexibility that the three-beat option affords convinced anyone, or the fact that Old English alliterative verse allowed three beats in some of its a-verses. As persuasive as all of this evidence is, it simply has not been enough for most metrists. Therefore, this section will argue from the nature of the meter, which is inductive, and the language, which is stress-timed. The nature of English as a stress-timed language combined with the half-line dissimilation, or asymmetry, not only justify the presence of heavy a-verses as metrical entities in these poems as they are written, but also have created in the a-verse the purest form of accentual verse in the history of English poetry.

The question, then, is why we should accept the three-beat or heavy a-verse as a metrical entity. Borroff's 1962 study probably cast the proverbial pebble in the pond that has since rippled for almost half a century. She separately treats "normal" and

"extended" a-verses in chapters 7 and 8, respectively,[103] and she does a beautiful job of accomplishing her main goal: she resoundingly refutes the seven-stress theory in both chapters and establishes the four-stress theory. In the process of driving home her four-stress theory, she encountered an immediate hurdle. The main problem for a two-beat theory (or half of a four-stress theory) for *Gawain* or any poem of the Alliterative Revival is accommodating that significant minority of heavy a-verses: "Whether the extended first half-line is interpreted as a subclass of, or a real departure from, the normal two-part form, it is obvious that the *Gawain*-poet was more inclined than other poets of the alliterative tradition to load the long line with heavy syllables, both alliterating and nonalliterating" (200). She creates a false dichotomy here of normal and extended lines, given how normal it is for this poet to use heavy a-verses; this binary is perhaps a necessary one to once and for all reject the seven-stress theory in favor of the four-stress, but inaccurate no less.

With this property of English in mind, Borroff argues that it would be perfectly natural to give two of the three beats, or "chief syllables," more stress than the third.[104] The method by which she achieves this argument, however, is flawed by her reliance on nursery rhymes, which are such strong examples of template meter that we call their rhythms "sing-song," and her misunderstanding of William Thompson's use of the term "compound" to describe dipodic meter, which also has a template whose rhythm can

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[103] Chapter 7's title is "The Alliterative Long Line: The Normal Form," and Chapter 8's title is "The Alliterative Long Line: The Extended Form."

[104] She relies on Oakden's numbers, which both Vantuono and I have found to be low for the *Gawain*-poet, and which I have found to be low for Langland and the *Troy*-poet.

overwhelm the language. Her use of "chief" and "minor chief" syllables comes from Thompson's theory.[105] She later argues that a-verses with three linguistic stresses do not have three metrical stresses, again misusing Thompson's terminology: "It is my belief that there are in fact no extended lines in *Gawain*, if by an extended line is meant one containing five chief syllables of equal rank . . . . There is, of course, no way of proving that where subordination is possible, it is also mandatory" (198). In sum, she argues that these long lines cannot have five primary ictuses because dipodic meters cannot. The fact that she does not commit to a theory of how the five stresses become four ictuses shows a smart hesitation on her part not to paint herself into a corner.

It is fair to wonder, though, why such an escape route has been considered necessary by other metrists; given the three-beat or heavy a-verses present in both Old English and Middle English alliterative meter, it is a difficult phenomenon to explain away. Moreover, with a-verses we are dealing in a meter that fully exploits our expectations of linguistic stress, either realized or potential, because we quite literally cannot predict what the resulting metrical pattern will be: "Normal grammatical stress cannot be 'tilted' toward the abstract metrical pattern, because the abstract metrical pattern is not known until the normal grammatical stress pattern is known."[106] The one requirement that a poet would have to know, in fact, is that the a-verse must be different from the b-verse; this requirement is remarkably simple and flexible and, thus,

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[105] Borroff, chapter 7, especially 171-182. In the end, she cannot establish the meter of *Gawain* because she argues from deductive meters.

[106] On p. 515 of Cable, "Stress-Timing and the History of English Prosody," *Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics*, 1 (2001), 509-536.

imminently learnable and teachable.[107] Part of the flexibility of the meter, as evidenced by the poems themselves, is the option of a three-beat a-verse. The heavy a-verse increases variability from the b-verse; while present in a minority of lines in both Old English and Middle English alliterative poetry, it appears often enough to disallow classification as a subclass of or exception to the "normal" line.

Borroff's handling of these heavy a-verses has undergone criticism from proponents of the two-stress a-verse.[108] Joan Turville-Petre argues: "Efforts have been made to square this practice [overweighting of a-verses] with metrical theory, and the results are well summarized by Miss Borroff. None is satisfactory, and her own formula of 'compound units' illustrates the problem rather than solving it."[109] Turville-Petre makes the same error of false analogy between the meter of *Gawain* and the deductive meters of Shakespeare and Spenser to argue for metrical subordination of words that would receive lexical stress in normal language, particularly nouns and adjectives. Ironically, Turville-Petre knows how these words would be treated in natural language: "In ordinary prose usage, such compounds are double-stressed . . . they become single-stressed in attributive position" (321). By "attributive position," she means how stress shifts once a compound such as "half-hearted," which would get primary stress on *heart*, shifts stress in attributive positions, such as "half-hearted attempt," where the primary

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[107] After all, any theory must account for how quickly and completely a disparate set of poets started using the same meter.

[108] To create a distinction between theorists, I am calling the metrists who reject heavy a-verses proponents of the two-stress theory, as opposed to Cable and Duggan, proponents of the three-beat a-verse.

[109] "The Metre of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." *English Studies* 57 (1976), 310-28. 324.

stress shifts to *half*. She makes an interesting argument, but it fails because it treats the lines as if the meter could be predicted, as it can with the deductive iambic pentameter.[110]

Thorlac-Turville Petre also falls into this trap when he, too, defends the two-stress theory: "a metrical pattern once established is not easily broken, and the context of the two-stress half-lines imposes its rhythm upon lines which might, out of that context, be interpreted in another way" (54). This argument at once asserts that a standard pattern can be discerned in the a-verse by denying that a significant minority of the lines could have a standard pattern, too. Moreover, it begs the question: if the two-stress meter is established by a regular pattern, than the pattern of the a-verses would be regular, and it is not. The second line of *Gawain* opens with a three-beat a-verse, so no such pattern can be established from the very start of the poem. Also, in this meter, the language imposes its rhythm (stress-timed) on the meter, not vice versa; Turville-Petre has in mind a template where none can possibly be found.

Not surprisingly, then, Noriko Inoue's recent argument about the a-verse misfires.[111] Not only has she borrowed in large part from Joan Turville-Petre's flawed argument concerning "crowded" a-verses, even adopting that term to describe them, but she crafts rules and regulations in an attempt to make the a-verse look like the b-verse. This is a bold move on her part, but its premise is fundamentally flawed: it simply is not possible to make the a-verse, which is almost purely inductive, look like the b-verse, which is also inductive but has a strong deductive aspect. For some reason, Inoue

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[110] There is also the fact that her argument is probably too complex to be teachable to the poets.
[111] Inoue, Noriko. "A New Theory of Alliterative A-Verses." *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 18 (2004): 107-32.

chooses to ignore Cable's a-verse rules entirely,[112] and instead engages in an interesting conversation with Duggan's much looser rules. She rightly calls him on some lapses in his logic and gaps in his theory,[113] but in fact his theory better describes the a-verse than hers does. The primary mistake she makes is her effort to separate linguistic stress from metrical beats: "Metrical and linguistic stress, therefore, must be distinguished from each other, and should be treated as two different phenomena (which usually co-occur, but do not *necessarily* do so)."[114] Duggan and Cable both understand that with the unpredictable nature of the inductive alliterative meter, natural language stress is the only guide to reveal the meter and thus cannot be separated from the meter.

The second flaw in her argument is an outgrowth of this one about natural language. She assumes that the rules in operation in the b-verse must be the same in the a-verse. She first poses this provocative question about the a-verse: "Does *no* metrical subordination of linguistic stress occur in these verses?"[115] Natural stress is regularly subordinated in deductive meters in order to maintain the pattern, which is the process Inoue describes, as it occurs in the b-verse. Indeed, the occasional subordination of words that would receive linguistic stress in natural language is the key deductive metrical feature of the b-verse.[116] In the *Gawain* sample, eleven words that would normally receive stress are subordinated, and in the *Piers* sample, thirty-three such words

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[112] She also neglects to differentiate Cable's b-verse theory from Duggan's (note 1, p. 107).
[113] She quotes David Lawton to support her point that in Duggan's theory, "it is odd that rules are introduced only at the middle of the line" (108); she faults Duggan's insistence on AA/AX alliteration (note 57, p. 126).
[114] Inoue 113, emphasis hers.
[115] Inoue 115, emphasis hers.
[116] The reason for assuming stress subordination in the Middle English b-verse is that it approaches the kind of template meter that Chaucer uses.

are subordinated.[117] The answer to her question, then, concerning metrical subordination of linguistically stressed words in three-beat a-verses and possibly even four-beat a-verses is that it cannot occur as a regular feature of the meter, because there can be no regular features of the a-verse except that its meter must be dissimilar from the b-verse's. The burden of proof should be on the metrists who wish to regularize the a-verse with template subordination, not on the metrists who see it as almost purely accentual and fundamentally irregular.

The previous section ended with a scansion that involved a compound and claimed that this scansion blurred the line between a-verses of different beats. These a-verses end on strong syllables upon which the poets did not allow b-verses to end. In a surprising parallel to the stress-shift phenomenon that the name *Gawain* presents, *Piers Plowman* as a name offers a similar "not equal to" b-verse rhythm, in that *–man* is a strong syllable, not weak, and thus never ends a b-verse:

		x / x x / \
VI.3	a	Quod Perkyn þe plouman

Here are other examples with *–man*; it is probably significant that ictus clearly falls on *man* in VI.70a when it is not in a compound, which is indicated by the direction of the slash:

		x / x x x / \
Pr.75a		And rauȝte with his ragman
		x x x / x /
VI.70a		And alkyn crafty men

[117] Ten from *Gawain* and thirty from *Piers* are nouns subordinated to adjectives.

x x / x / \
VI.155a And to Pieres þe plowman

x / x x / \
VI.192a And wenten as werkemen

x x x x / \
VI.322a Ac I warne ȝow, werkemen

The same process occurs in the following a-verses, which end in syllables not allowed at the end of b-verses:

x / x x / \
Pr.105a þere Crist is in kyngdome

x / x / \
Pr.116a The kyng and kny**ȝ**thode

x x x / • x / \
VI.17a For I shal lene hem lyflode [*give, livelihood*]

x / x x x / \
VI.236a And laboure for þi lyflode

Notably, the final syllables *-dom* (< OE. n. *dóm*) and *–hode* (< OE. n. *hád*) are suffixes whose noun forms had long been obsolescent.

Significantly, these compound nouns, including the compounds in *–man* above, must receive stress, even if it is not primary stress. English as a stress-time language has a stress hierarchy that the deductive meters' binary of **(x /)** cannot capture, but one that is at home in inductive meters because they are realized through these linguistic hierarchies. An example of this variation would be the differing stress patterns of the following three sentences, where **/** indicates a primary stress, **** indicates a secondary stress, and **x** indicates a syllable that does not receive linguistic stress:

/ \
I saw a blackbird.

/ / / x
I saw a black bird. It was a raven.

Arguably, what look to be two primary stresses in the second example would differ slightly in stress as to whether the speaker was emphasizing *black* or *bird*. But the existence of a secondary linguistic stress in the compound *blackbird* is hard to deny when compared to the stress pattern in *raven*. The following lines offer more examples of this phenomenon:

	x / x x / /
1444a	and sparred forth good sped
	x / x x / \
VI.64a	A busshel of bredcorne
	x x / x / \
VI.322a	Eny leef of lechecraft

The following scansions are a selection of a-verses that this study argues must have three beats to be metrical; these are the a-verses rejected as having linguistic but not metrical stress, two features that we have seen are necessarily inseparable in the inductive a-verse. The metrist who accepts the inherent flexibility of the a-verse and then tries to impose a template on it is trying to shoehorn the a-verse into a b-verse, and in this meter, such cannot be the case, given that most a-verses are longer and semantically heavier:

	x / x x / x /
1140a	Vnclosed þe kenel dore

It just does not seem possible to subordinate stress in the noun *dore*, even though it does not alliterate.

/ / x /
1213a Goud moroun, gay

In what is arguably the shortest line in all the lines scanned for this dissertation, a remarkable three of four syllables receive ictus. All three are marked as primary because we cannot know which of the first two words would have received primary stress. This line with its four syllables presents a case in point for abolishing *extended* as a description of these lines; most lines, like the following, are longer than b-verses:

x x / x x / x / x
1256a Bot I louue þat ilke lorde

x/ x / x x x / x
1276a Iwysse, worþy, quoþ þe wyȝe

x x / x x x / • x x / x
1372a Thenne comaunded þe lorde in þat sale

It would be difficult to subordinate a stress in the preceding lines. In the first a-verse, it is possible to argue that *ilke* should be subordinated, since it does not alliterate, but the same is not true for the second line. The third line does not have two alliterating staves, though two of the staves alliterate with the b-verse. *Piers* has similar lines that also defy stress subordination:

/ / • x x / x
Pr.4a Went wyde in þis world

/ x / x x /
Pr.92a Somme seruen þe kyng

x / x x / x /
Pr191a þat witnisseth holiwrite

x / • x x / x x / x
VI.4a I haue an half acre to erye

x x / x x / / x
VI.57a I assente, bi seynt Iame

/ x x / •x / x
VI.183a Suffre hem lyue he seyde

No theory of the a-verse can be complete without considering the minority of lines that could have four beats in the a-verse. The theory argued in this chapter allows for this permutation not as an exception to any rule; the sole rule of the a-verse is asymmetry. The following verses display variations of this feature. Perhaps the most famous of these a-verses is from *Piers*:

x / / \ x /
Pr.17a A faire felde ful of folke

This a-verse has long troubled metrists because *ful* is a filler word in all Middle English poetry. I would argue that it receives ictus to emphasize metrically and rhetorically that the *fair field* is indeed *full* of *folk*; here the dreamer sees all of humanity, and the meter emphasizes the hugeness of that sight. Here are the remaining four-beat a-verses from the lines scanned for this study:

/ / x x / /
Pr.125a Crist kepe þe, sire kyng

/ x x / x x / x x /
VI.9a Somme shal sowe þe sakke quod Piers

x / / x x / /
1159a þe does dryuen with gret dyn

/ / x / / x
1208a 'God moroun, sir Gawayn,'

x / / / / x
1258a 'In god fayth, sir Gawayn,'

x / x / • x / • x /
VI.78a For holicherche is hote of hem

x / / x x x / /
VI.105a My plow-pote shal be my pyk-staf

x / x / x / x /
VI.217a With houndes bred and hors bred

x / x x / x / x /
VI.521a Contemplatyf lyf or actyf lyf

x / / x / x / x
VI.303a With good ale, as Glotoun tauȝte

Not surprisingly, Cable offers an apt description of what the poets achieved in these asymmetrical lines: "The general effect, however, is unmistakable. The a-verse has greater length and more speed, and the b-verse puts on the brakes" (526). The stress-timed nature of English creates a paradox: more unstressed syllables speed up the a-verse, whereas fewer unstressed syllables slow down the b-verse. The a-verse may be heavier and longer, but the b-verse is slower, and the lines are thus metrical.

Chapter 3:

The Destruction of Troy's Different Rules

Luick based his analysis on the most regular exemplar of the new alliterative style, *The Destruction of Troy*. (Joan Turville-Petre, "The Metre of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," 311-2)

Cable has responded that *The Destruction of Troy* is not an alliterative poem at all!

(Hoyt Duggan, "Role and Distribution of *–ly* Adverbs," 141)

A School of Poets?

It is quite common for metrists to consider the poems of the Alliterative Revival together for the purpose of making generalizations; J. P. Oakden's tabulations, as unreliable as they have proven to be, have been seminal if only in the number of metrists seeking to reproduce his numbers or find their own.[118] In the process of creating such generalizations, metrists have often made the dubious assumption that the poets were all writing in the same meter using the same rules. In her chapter titled "The Historical Study of Style," Marie Borroff assumes that there is a single alliterative school in operation during the Revival that created style from, among other devices, stock words and phrases; she echoes Oakden here, though she finds his categories difficult to use.[119] In opening his chapter called "The Revival," Thorlac Turville-Petre's first subheading reads "A

[118] J. P. Oakden, *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English*, 2 vols, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1930-5)
[119] "Indeed, it is obvious to anyone familiar with the works of the alliterative school that most of the vocabulary and phraseology of *Gawain* is thoroughly traditional both in its content and function" (33). See 46-8 for her treatment of Oakden's categories.

School of Poets," and it begins with a seemingly obvious statement: "The range and variety of alliterative poems written between the mid-fourteenth century and the early years of the fifteenth century are very wide." He later claims: "It is at once apparent that we are here dealing with a 'school' of poets, though one that embraces a huge variety of styles and subjects." Significantly, Turville-Petre separates himself from Oakden, who perceived this school as tight and interdependent; however, he groups all of the poetry of this generation as a single, if heterogeneous, entity. It is also an incomplete entity, as a result of gaps in the record, and therefore, "no more than a partial picture of the alliterative school can ever be drawn."[120]

All of this logic is flawed by the untenable assumption that these poems are the product of a single school of poets in operation during this period. What has supported this assumption is the flurry of alliterative poems that proliferated from the mid-1300s till sometime in the 1400s and the many similarities they share; this flurry starts at roughly the same time the Plague hits England (1348) and Scotland (1349), almost perfectly parallels the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), and includes the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 among other social upheavals that created unprecedented geographic and social mobility.[121] In other words, there were many circumstantial reasons for a revival of English nationalism that could have found one outgrowth in a revivifying of a native meter.

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[120] Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival*. (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 1977), 26-9.
[121] See Hans Frede Nielsen, *From Dialect to Standard: English in England 1154-1776* (Odense: UP of Southern Denmark, 2005), 8-11, 14-18.

The English linguistic situation was equally chaotic, given the wealth of speakers and dialects whose use of final *–e* and other historical formations was at various stages of death. This linguistic upheaval provided the poets of the time an unparalleled treasure trove of stress and syllabic doublets with which to play. Certain elements of the alliterative tradition had survived from Anglo-Saxon times, as can be seen in occasional manuscripts predating the Revival.[122] The vast number of manuscripts from this rather short period of time—the same period of time in which Chaucer nativized a Continental meter—can leave no doubt that some energy sparked a renewed and vigorous interest not only in English poetry but particularly in the native alliterative meter as a viable style for poetry of all kinds and left us, gapped record and all, with some of the best poetry in the English language.

But if we accept that the period of the Revival is roughly a hundred years long, and that the poets who innovated and invigorated it were adults at the beginning, we can see that the Revival was perpetuated by at least three generations of poets, allowing for Plague and other causes of early death. The poets coming into their prime at the end of this period would probably have had less contact with speakers who retained final *–e* in their dialects, and the first wave of poets had most likely, like Chaucer, died. The further loss of final *–e* did not have to be a problem; again, we must differentiate spoken from poetic dialect and acknowledge that Langland and the *Gawain*-poet incorporated historical final *–e* and stress and syllabic doublets that almost certainly did not exist in

[122] The meter of these pre-Revival poems, however, cannot be addressed here, though some discussion is offered in Chapter 5 of the Harley Lyrics.

their speech, even if they heard such forms used by older generations and by speakers of more conservative dialects. In other words, these endings were teachable.

In writing in a traditional form whose meter relied on linguistically conservative forms that were already dead or dying in the dialects of the West Midlands, the poems and the poets risked losing three critical audiences: their readers, their listeners, and their scribes. It is the latter group upon whom metrists most willingly vent their spleen, though perhaps these scribes deserve our pity instead, as they transcribed poems and were faced with final *–e* and a readership that was increasingly less likely to recognize and appreciate it. This is, of course, all speculation, though it is grounded in the evidence of the manuscripts and the history of the English language.

This chapter argues that *The Destruction of Troy*'s meter is anomalous and, therefore, challenges the assumption that there was a single school of poets during the Alliterative Revival. Turville-Petre wants to include all the poems in a single metrical school, whereas Duggan wants to exclude *Piers Plowman* from this tradition: "In many respects—certainly in the constraints involving rhythmic, syntactic, and alliterative patterning—Langland was, paradoxically, not an alliterative poet at all."[123] Cable, on the other hand, singles out both *Piers Plowman* and *The Destruction of Troy* from this single metrical tradition; he argues that the former diverges the most from the metrical rules he sets forth within the framework of the Alliterative Revival poems, and that the latter, with *Joseph of Arimathie*, follows a different set of rules from the ones he perceives even in *Piers*.

[123] "The Shape of the B-Verse" 578.

While Cable does not say that *Troy* is not an alliterative poem, he excludes it from the poems of the Alliterative Revival and from the principles that describe them. There can be no question, after all, that *Troy* is an alliterative poem. It alliterates and its meter is inductive, not deductive, which places it firmly in the native tradition. But the poet's metrical choices are aberrant. The meter has more in common with the medieval dolnik than either *Gawain* or *Piers* do, because the meter has a regularity to it not found in the other unrhymed alliterative poems. The epigraphs demonstrate the paradox of this poem: on the one hand, Luick considered it so regular that he based his theories on it, but on the other, Cable finds its brand of regularity to be irregular in comparison to poems of the Revival, and has repeatedly insisted that it follows different rules; these rules are of enormous importance in tracking the history of the Alliterative Revival and the death of final *–e* in literary English, at least in this verse form. The previous chapter argued that *Piers*' meter is regular and thus shares the Alliterative Revival's metrical style. But was there a single metrical style? The evidence of *Troy* belies this assumption. The poet of *Troy* had some schooling in the meter of the Revival; we can never know how much, but it is certainly enough to confuse metrists about its place among its peers.

PATTERNS OF AVOIDANCE AND NORMATIVE TENDENCIES

The Destruction of Troy is metrically unusual, enough so that Turville-Petre combines a discussion of its meter with *Piers*' under one heading. The fact that the *Troy* poet is as spare with his syllables as Langland is generous with his places the two poems at opposite extremes of the rhythmic range.[124] *Troy* is one of several translations in Middle English in which the poet decided to render the original version in alliterative verse; Lawman's *Brut*, which predates the Alliterative Revival, is perhaps the most famous example of a translation into alliterative verse. The *Troy* manuscript dates from the mid-sixteenth century, though no one knows when the poem was written. What sets this poet's endeavors apart is his failure to engage his audience—the modern one, at least. Turville-Petre, for instance, considers that we can only grasp the mastery of such an artist as the *Gawain*-poet, whose variety and flexibility he praises, when we compare him to "an artist who is competent but no more than that," the *Troy* poet: "He was a writer who knew the standard patterns of alliterative verse, and for fourteen thousand lines he applied them rigidly and without much variation to his faithful translation."[125] It is of little use to comment on the merit of the poetry; by all indications, *Troy* enjoyed a much longer manuscript life than *Gawain*, so the best conclusion based on the evidence is that the former was in fact the more popular poem.

Turville-Petre includes an example of the poem to demonstrate the poet's lackluster competence, which is offered below to demonstrate the poem's rhythm. It is

[124] Turville-Petre 58.
[125] Turville-Petre 58.

scanned according to the principles argued in the previous chapter, and all punctuation has been removed. The symbol • denotes an elided syllable; I have marked historical final *–e*, but the poet may in fact no longer have pronounced many of these:

x / x x / x x x / x x x /
Hyt fell thus by fortune þe fairest of þe yere

x / x x / x x / / x
Was past to the point of the pale wintur

/ x x x / x x x / x / x
Heruest with the heite and the high sun

x / x x x / x x / /
Was comyn into colde with a course low

/ x / x x / x x x / x
Trees thurgh tempestes tynde hade þere leues

x / x x / x x x / x /
And briddes abatid of hor brem songe

x / x x / / x x x / x
The wynde of the west wackenet aboue

/ x x / x x x x / / x
Blowyng full bremly o the brode ythes

x / • / xx / x / x x / x
The clere aire ouercast with cloudys full thicke

x / x x / x / x x / x
With mystes full merke mynget with showres

/ x x x / x x / x x /
Flodes were felle thurghe fallyng of rayne

x / x x / x x x / • /
And winter vp wacknet with his wete aire (12463-74)[126]

Turville-Petre remarks that the line "With mystes full merke" is "an entirely typical half-line," and therein lies the key to *Troy*'s difference. It is the lack of differentiation between the a-verse and the b-verse that is immediately remarkable; even aesthetically, the caesuras in these verses line up almost exactly, which is another aberrance from what we see in these poems; please see the examples in Chapter 2 for a comparison.

Patterns of avoidance are as important to the process of determining meter as normative tendencies, and the *Troy* poet typically avoids what the rest of the poets employ, and employs what the rest of the poets avoid. As stated above, Duggan and Cable discerned the rhythm of the b-verse by noting the patterns that the poets of the Alliterative Revival chose to avoid in the second half-line: more than one long dip, and more than one syllable at the end of the line. Such a pattern of avoidance confirmed that a normative tendency of the line was in fact a rule. Both metrists agree that the b-verse must have one and only one long dip either before or between the two and only two beats; they differ in their specification of the final dip. Cable insists that a metrical b-verse must have a single unaccented syllable at its end, what in modern parlance would be referred to as a feminine ending. Duggan considers this pattern of feminine endings a normative tendency and not a rule. Most metrists have conflated the poets' spoken and written dialects, so Duggan is in good company; as the previous chapters have detailed, the foundation of Marie Borroff's denial of historical final *–e* and other etymological

[126] All lines from *Troy* are taken from *The 'Gest Hystoriale' of the Destruction of Troy*, ed. G. A. Panton and David Donaldson, EETS OS 35 & 56 (London, 1869-1874).

options available to the London poets was simply that she could not see how such forms could have survived in the *Gawain*-poet's speech; her objection is the accepted rationale. It has only been in this century that other metrists have provided evidence that at least in the requirement of the final, unstressed syllable, Cable is correct.[127]

Troy inverts some of the patterns of avoidance and normative tendencies we see in the other poems of the Alliterative Revival in both the a-verse and the b-verse, but some of these patterns it maintains. As regular as the rhythms are within the poem, they remain unpredictable from line to line; this lack of predictability is a quality of inductive meters and is arguably the strongest shared feature among the unrhymed alliterative poems. The poem's alliteration coincides very regularly with ictus. These alliterative patterns, however, vary much less than either the unrhymed or rhymed alliterative poems; in the three hundred lines scanned from this poem, 92% have the alliterative pattern AA/AX. No other alliterative poem, rhymed or unrhymed, approaches this amount of sameness in the alliteration. This high rate of invariability exists in the half-lines, as noted above: what Duggan and perhaps Cable would both call b-verse rhythms occur very regularly in the a-verse. Most often, these lines would be unmetrical by Cable's principles: the b-verses often do not end on a final unstressed syllable, which we have seen is a metrical requirement. This lack calls into question whether final *–e* exists in this poem, but even scanned for final *–e* as above, the poem still fails to conform to established normative tendencies and patterns of avoidance. Finally, the extreme lack of

[127] See especially Ad Putter and Myra Stokes, "Spelling, Grammar and Metre in the Works of the *Gawain*-Poet," *Parergon*, 18 (2000), 77-95, and Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter, 'The Distribution of Infinitives in *–e* and *–en* in Some Middle English Alliterative Poems', *Medium Ævum,* 74 (2005), 221-47. The previous chapter discusses the conclusions of these articles in depth.

heavy (three-beat) a-verses,[128] which occur with enough frequency in the rest of the corpus that Cable includes them in his a-verse rules, indicates that such lines may be unusual in this poet's meter.

The epigraphs to this chapter point to an apparent paradox. Karl Luick, whose theories resemble those of this dissertation to a large degree, concluded that final *–e* was normally pronounced and stated the so-called Duggan-Cable b-verse constraints decades before the two metrists developed their theories; he arrived at his conclusions via *Troy*.[129] Cable, on the other hand, explicitly excludes *Troy* from his tabulations because, he insists, it follows different rules. So convinced is he of this fact that the index of *The English Alliterative Tradition* singles it out; the listing reads "*Destruction of Troy*, different meter of," whereas all other poems in the index are listed first by title alone (186). Duggan has taken exception to this exclusion; his use of an exclamation point alone emphasizes his shock, though his conclusion that Cable thus excludes *Troy* from alliterative poetry is extreme. It is not surprising that Duggan rejects Cable's argument so forcefully that he misreads Cable; at the same time that Cable's rules do not describe the meter we see in *Troy*, Duggan's rules could generate it.

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[128] The previous chapter makes an argument against calling these a-verses "extended" or "crowded." Basically, these two terms are misleading, and the latter is negative. Calling such a-verses "heavy" more accurately captures the phenomenon.

[129] Luick, "Die englische Stabreimzeile im XIV, XV, und XVI Jahrhundert," *Anglia*, 9 (1889), 392-443, 553-618.

Duggan's corpora, while currently four times as large as Cable's,[130] never allowed for any systematic use of these historical endings and, therefore, failed to grasp the importance of final *–e* to the poets' phonology and meter. His entire original corpus was scanned without a single final *–e*. Cable considers Duggan's corpora problematic because his analysis levels different features of the poems, and Cable uses *Troy* as a case in point of a poem that Duggan includes and Cable excludes from the Alliterative Revival.[131] Duggan has, of course, made the assumption discussed above: this poem is but one more production of the single school of Alliterative Revival poets. The foundation of Cable's principles is that the a-verse must not have a b-verse pattern, and vice versa, and he points to the *Troy* poet's either ignorance or avoidance of the rules in consistently writing b-verse lines in the a-verse.[132] In sum, the poet avoids three patterns that have long had acceptance as normative tendencies, if not rules, in these poems:

1. The normative tendency for the a-verse to be longer than the b-verse;
2. The normative tendency of a final unaccented syllable on the b-verse;
3. The normative tendency for a significant minority of three-beat a-verses.

The first pattern, asymmetry of the a-verse and b-verse, has proven to be true for *Gawain* and *Piers*, as the previous chapter argues. The second pattern has been affirmed by the previous chapter, which builds on the evidence provided by Putter, Stokes, and

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[130] Cable used 6100 lines to reach his conclusions in *The English Alliterative Tradition* (68), while Duggan's corpora have grown to 28,282 lines, according to "The Role and Distribution of -ly Adverbs," cited below (144).
[131] *English Alliterative Tradition* 89.
[132] *English Alliterative Tradition* 111.

Jefferson's work on final *–e*. It is the third pattern, though, that has remained a point of contention among metrists who have debated whether the a-verses have three *metrical* beats. This chapter argues that a fundamental component of the flexibility and asymmetry found in the Revival poetry lies in the use of three-beat or heavy a-verses.

The previous chapters provide ample evidence that the poets of the Alliterative Revival had access to the same poetic vocabulary that the London poets did, despite the fact that the London dialect was a more conservative one than the alliterative poets'. Indeed, the *Gawain*-poet probably exploited the unprecedented set of stress and syllabic doublets in his medieval dolnik to the same extent that Chaucer did, and more b-verses of *Gawain* and especially *Piers* are metrical with the application of elision. The problem of the b-verse is most often a surfeit of syllables, while the problem of a-verses is the opposite. Adding historical final *–e* and other endings thus benefits the a-verse more than the b-verse, while elision and perhaps syncope and apocope moderate the effects. The application of Cable's rules with the addition of elision and other necessary adjustments yields a remarkably high number of metrical a-verses and b-verses from two such disparate alliterative poems as *Gawain* and *Piers*. What is most surprising about this fact is that Cable's rules are far stricter than Duggan's.

TROY'S IRREGULAR REGULARITY

What is perhaps most unusual about the regularity of *Troy* is that the version we have reveals seemingly little scribal intervention in the meter. It is astonishing that a mid-sixteenth century manuscript could reproduce the poem so well. Duggan's acknowledgment of this anomaly is significant, given his well-documented aversion to scribes and manuscripts that exist as single copies. In 1990, he argues that he selected *Troy* for one of his corpora "because it shows a high degree of correlation with the metrical rules, suggesting a reliable scribe."[133] In 1994, he confirms his high opinion of the manuscript and scribe: "When we discover that fully thirty-five percent of the a-verses of *Destruction of Troy* (perhaps the best preserved, most accurately copied alliterative poem in the entire corpus) are unmetrical by Cable's theory, even when every possible final *–e* is conceded to him, we may feel something less than satisfaction with Cable's speculations about the 'surprising facts.'"[134] These "surprising facts," a term that echoes Charles S. Peirce and his explanation of the abductive reasoning model, are the foundation of Cable's arguments about the a-verse and the b-verse in *The English Alliterative Tradition*; he opens chapter 3 with this phrase as subheading. Duggan's confidence in the a-verses of *Troy* will be addressed below; for now, it suffices to remember that Luick developed a remarkably robust metrical theory with *Troy* as his

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[133] "Stress Assignment in Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 89 (1990), 309-329, 317.
[134] "The Role and Distribution of -ly Adverbs in Middle English Alliterative Verse," in *Loyal Letters: Studies on Mediaeval Alliterative Poetry & Prose*, ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (Groningen, Netherlands: Forsten, 1994), 131-54. 141.

model, and that the prevailing opinion has long been that *Troy* is the most regular of the Revival poems.

The argument that *Troy* is irregular rather than extremely regular is, however, not novel, and other metrists have concurred with Cable's exclusion of *The Destruction of Troy* from his tabulations and theory-formation in regards to the poetry of the Alliterative Revival. In his review of *The English Alliterative Tradition*, Derek Pearsall observes:

> Cable's theories score resoundingly, though, in detaching *The Destruction of Troy* from the corpus of Middle English alliterative writing, instead of regarding it, as do Duggan and his co-editor, Thorlac Turville-Petre, as the skeletal epitome of alliterative metrics. As Cable argues, the soporific tendencies of *The Destruction of Troy* are there not because it is excessively regular but because it fails completely to observe the metrical rules that distinguish a-verses from b-verses.[135]

More recently, Ad Putter has confirmed that *The Destruction of Troy* is exceptional based on his findings that confirm the rule that b-verses cannot have masculine endings, which this poet permitted.[136]

One might rightly question whether the poet wrote in metrical b-verses at all; his well-known tendency toward a "typical half-line" as opposed to a typical a-verse or b-verse presents ready evidence against such as assertion. More important, though, is the

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[135] Derek Pearsall, "Review: *The English Alliterative Tradition*" *The Review of English Studies* 45 (1994), 239-40. 240.

[136] "Chaucer's Verse and Alliterative Poetry: Grammar, Metre, and Some Secrets of the Syllable Count," *Poetica* 67 (2007), 19-35. See especially page 21 and note 13 on page 32.

fact that in the lines scanned for this study, 12% of his b-verses are unmetrical because they lack the final, unstressed syllable that Cable, Putter, Stokes, and Jefferson, and I have found to be a metrical requirement of the b-verse. Based on this requirement, thirty-seven of these are definitely unmetrical, but only three of these by Duggan's rules.[137] In *Gawain*, on the other hand, only 3% of the b-verses are unmetrical by the rules applied in the previous chapter, and in *Piers*, which even Cable and Putter have wanted to separate from the Revival poems, the number of unmetrical b-verses increases to 6%, which is still far below the number in *Troy*.

The majority of b-verses in *Troy* are metrical; this number is large enough to argue that the poet knew the rules of the b-verse, but not enough to argue that he followed these rules as such, and certainly not to the extent that he followed what he perceived as the rules of alliteration.[138] But the curious fact about the b-verses, as demonstrated in the difference between the number of unmetrical verses Cable's rules and Duggan's rules would find, is that we can only separate the metrical from the unmetrical when we assume an unstressed syllable at the end of the verse. Whereas Cable would find 12% of the b-verses unmetrical, Duggan would only find less than 1% of them unmetrical, which would indeed show extraordinary, even unprecedented, regularity. 28b is a good case in point of a b-verse that we now know is unmetrical, though not by Duggan's rules:

x x x / x /
28b when it distroyet was

[137] Duggan would find these three b-verses unmetrical: 104b, 163b, and 175b. Three b-verses, 247b, 161b, and 305b, are problematic and will be addressed below.
[138] In fact, the opening line is so regular that it is dactylic, except for the final unaccented syllable on the b-verse. This fact would in a small way support the idea that the poet knew the rules.

Thanks to the work of Putter and Stokes, we know that the poets of the Alliterative Revival avoided line endings on the monosyllabic *was*, preferring subjunctive *were*, thus proving that the latter must have been disyllabic.[139] Perhaps a scribe changed *were* to *was*; still, it is interesting that the line would be metrical if the inversion were omitted: *when it was distroyet*. Given the scribe's strict adherence to AA/AX alliteration, though, the inversion is metrical for this poem. In other words, alliteration is more important than meter to determining the rules the poet followed.

A number of lines, though, cannot be explained so easily. For example, 32b must be unmetrical:

x / x x /
32b for lernyng of vs.

There is simply no way to add a final unaccented syllable without completely changing the line. Similar lines are 33b, 43b, 44b, 47b, 48b; in the first fifty lines alone, 12% of the b-verses are inarguably unmetrical, if we accept Cable's rules and reject Duggan's.[140]

The b-verses show an interesting repetition of b-verse final words which call into question the poet's confidence with the metrical rules, at least with regard to final *-e*: to name a handful, *tyme* occurs three times, *hond* twice, *name* and *nome* seven times, *wise* and *wyse* six times, and *in* three times. The latter two are deceptive in that the words are

[139] Putter and Stokes, "Spelling, Grammar and Metre in the Works of the Gawain Poet" in *Parergon*, 10 (2000), 77-95. 92.

[140] It is interesting that disregarding the omission of the final unaccented syllable, these b-verses vary perhaps more metrically than *Gawain* or *Piers*. In the latter two poems, the b-verses with one long dip begin with an initial long dip about 25% of the time, whereas in Troy, a long initial as opposed to medial dip occurs in 127 lines, or 40% of the time. In this one way, then, Troy shows more rhythmic variety than the other two poems.

not what they seem; in 53b, *wise* is an adjective that means "wise, clever" (< OE. *wís*) and is monosyllabic:

x x / /
53b with a clerk wise

In the other five instances, *wise/wyse* means "way, means" and is a disyllable (< OE. fem. n. *wíse*). This latter form ends nine b-verses in *Gawain*, while the former never occurs there. *In* is another example of this phenomenon: in 89b and 227b, it is metrical because *in* is a preposition here (< OE. *innan*)[141]:

x / x x / x
89b & shalkes with in,

In the other instance, *in* means "inn, lodging" and is a monosyllable (< OE. neut. n. *inn*):

x x / x /
301b of þat curset In

These two errors gain significance in light of the care the Revival poets took to observe etymologies; Putter's most recent article gives several subtle examples alone of the extraordinary care these poets took to choose the appropriate form of a variety of words to meet metrical demands. Putter's examples come from the *Patience*, *Cleanness*, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, St. Erkenwald,* the *Alliterative Morte Arthure, Alexander and Dindimus*, and others.[142] *Destruction of Troy* bungles these finesses, either because the poet does not know them or ignores them.

[141] This etymological expansion pertains to instances where *in* ends a b-verse, either alone or as the latter part of a compound preposition. It existed as a syllabic doublet of the monosyllabic *in*.
[142] "Chaucer's Verse and Alliterative Poetry," pp. 22-29.

The a-verses, in fact, make a much stronger case for Troy's different rules. Of the 315 lines scanned for this study, 102 or 32% of them are unmetrical by Cable's new rules, which simply state that the a-verse must be asymmetrical. Another 25 lines, or 8.5%, do not have a b-verse rhythm. Given the unusually high number of masculine line endings in the b-verses, it is unlikely that the poet knew or followed this basic rule of asymmetry between the two half-lines; again, it is the "typical half-line" that has launched the investigation of *Troy*'s different rules. Thus, 129 a-verses could be irregular, which is 41% of them. Both tallies are in the neighborhood of Duggan's thirty-five percent, quoted above. Regardless, Duggan would only find one a-verse unmetrical:

x / • x / x
101a An yle enabit

One could argue from this a-verse that perhaps the poet did not use elision, therefore providing the requisite second syllable that would give the b-verse rhythm that this poet prefers in the a-verse; on the other hand, elision reduces the line to what we now recognize as an allowable a-verse rhythm. Moreover, it is possible that the alliteration of this line is created via liaison staves, a form of elision, since the alliterative sound is most likely <n> to create the pattern AA/AX.[143]

The poet shows a high level of sophistication in how often he uses words with unaccented prefixes in his alliterative and metrical patterning:

x x / x x x x / x x / x x / x
71 He translated it into latyn for likyng to here

[143] *Enabit* is our modern *inhabit* (ME *enhabit* < MF *enhabiter* and L *inhabitare* < *in* + *habitare*). It is questionable whether the <h> is pronounced; if it is, then the alliterative pattern becomes the much less usual but still acceptable AA/XX.

This perfectly metrical line has the typical alliterative pattern AA/AX. This pattern of second-syllable stressing also occurs in 77a, 85a, 117a, 135a, 144a, 147a, 160a, 163a, 170a, 171a, 205a, 220a, 222a, 228a (twice), 282a, 291a, 292a, 296a, and in 100 appears on both sides of the caesura:

x / x • x / x x / x x / x
100 A prouynce appropret aperte to Rome

The a-verse is unmetrical, the b-verse metrical, and two of the alliterating staves occur in the middle of the word. The alliteration in *Troy* shows subtleties that the meter does not.

There are any number of examples of rhythms that are acceptable to this poet that would have been unacceptable to poets of the Revival.

x / x x x / x x / x x x / x
6 And slydyn vppon slepe by slomeryng of Age

This line demonstrates the so-called "typical half-line." The meter of the b-verse is perfectly metrical, and the meter of the a-verse is identical to it.

x / x x x x / x x / x / x x
104 A noble man for þe nonest is namet Pelleus.

The b-verse is certainly unmetrical; the a-verse could only be metrical if *man* receives ictus. This latter point is debatable; the argument in this chapter and the previous one concerning three-beat a-verses would allow *man* to receive a beat. *Men* is stressed in 102a where it carries the second beat and alliterates, but lines 126a and 129a are like 104a in that they contain two alliterating beats already.

The poet misuses or does not know how to use the optional syllabic doublet "for to + *infinitive*," which the London poets and the alliterative poets alternated with "to +

infinitive" to meet the demands of the meter. This construction makes 4b, 165b, 186b, 230b, and 272b metrical by providing the single required dip:

x / x x / x
272b þis werke for to ende;

These examples would appear to indicate that the poet knew when to use this longer, more historical doublet, but the a-verse evidence belies that conclusion. The form "for to + *infinitive*" appears in 17a, 24a, 51a, 106a, 117a, 192a, 203a, 237a, 245a, and 307a. In 192a, the a-verse is metrical whether the "for" is added or not; "for" is supererogatory. This construction makes metrical 51a, 203a, and 237a, but the majority of these lines remain unmetrical despite the poet's choice to use the syllabic doublet.

Yet one of the fundamental components of *Troy*'s failure, in Pearsall's words, "to completely observe the metrical rules" is its dearth of heavy a-verses; Pearsall, notably, is among metrists who argue that the a-verse can only have two beats: "All of [Cable's] three-stress a-verses read as two-stress, with 'ornamental' alliteration on unstressed or weakly stressed syllables" (240). Borroff, Joan Turville-Petre, Noriko Inoue, Ad Putter, Myra Stokes, and Judith Jefferson share Pearsall's point of view; oddly, Duggan accepts the three-beat a-verse as metrical, as do a large number of editors. In the sample of *Troy* chosen for this study, only 21 lines can be heavy or three-beat a-verses, or 7%. This proportion is unusually low in comparison to the *Gawain*-poet's poems and others in the Revival meter. The quality of these a-verses, though, matches the other poets', so these a-verses are most likely rare rather than unmetrical. The point here is that he follows different rules.

Of the 21 lines, 11 alliterate AAA. Here are two examples:

x / x / x x /
172a And wo this wethur shuld wyn

x / x / x x /
190a Of grete gobbettes of gold

It is hard to imagine subordination of any of the alliterating syllables or to justify such stress subordination. The same argument can be made about these examples, which are also heavy but not AAA:

/ • x x / x /
177a Girde out the grete teth

x / x / x / x
183a With depe woundes and derfe

As argued in the previous chapter, alliterative meter as an inductive meter is unpredictable except that it follows natural language patterns. To argue that these heavy a-verses are actually two-beat is to say that meter somehow must become deductive in these lines. Such a line of reasoning rejects the very thing that makes alliterative poetry such a pleasure: the way it works with natural language rather than against it.

Quality aside, the quantity of three-beat a-verses in *Troy* is significantly lower than in the poems of the Revival; it is this omission on the poet's part that have largely resulted in a poem that is "monotonous," according to Oakden, and "soporific," according to Turville-Petre. The former accepted the existence of three-beat a-verses as metrical entities, though he calls such alliteration "excessive." But in building a theory of an unbroken alliterative tradition that the record can neither prove nor disprove, Oakden perceives a trend toward "excessive" alliteration that begins in Old English verse, where

Schwellvers or the extended a-verse was used to add extra syllables and a beat to lines that typically alliterated AX/AX. The trend toward excessive alliteration, according to Oakden, is apparent in the typical alliterative pattern of AA/AX, where three staves and not two most commonly alliterate.[144] He argues that three-beat a-verses also became more prevalent, and lists the percentage of lines in each poem that have three beats.[145] Not only is his collection method hopelessly opaque, but his numbers also underestimate the occurrence of three-beat lines. William Vantuono counters Oakden's statistics with his own tabulations for the first 100 lines of the unrhymed alliterative poems in the Cotton manuscript: *Patience* has 21%, *Cleanness* 25%, and *Gawain* 36%.[146] Vantuono argues: "it is likely that higher percentages [of three-beat lines] appear in the poems as a whole, for Oakden did not consider secondary stress along with primary stress." This study has found 111 three-beat a-verses in 353 lines of *Gawain*, or 31%, and the number of three-beat a-verses in *Piers* is 188, or 34%.[147]

Troy could not have been written by a poet who was following the canny metrical rules of the Alliterative Revival, rules that even Langland followed. *Troy* could have been written, however, by a poet following rules very similar to Duggan's. Duggan's

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144 Vol 1, §5, 167-70, especially 169.

145 Vol 1, §6, 170-81.

146 Vantuono, ed, *The Pearl Poems: An Omnibus Edition*, 2 vols, (New York, Garland, 1984), 366-7.

147 Most editors do not take the care to quantify the three-beat a-verses, and they all hesitate to give the three beats equal prominence. Bennett begins his notes on the *Visio* with: "Each half line contains two or more strong syllables, two being the original and normal number. More than two are often found in the first half-line, but less frequently in the second" (note 1, 227). Hanna and Lawton's edition of *The Siege of Jerusalem* offers only one comment on alliterative patterning: "the only patterns of alliteration within the line are aa(a)/ax and permissible variants" (lxxiv); Tolkien, et al., have a similarly vague statement: "Some poets, of whom the author of *Gawain* was one, often used three lifts in the first half-line—though the third need not be of exactly the same prominence as the other two" (149). Duggan and T. Turville-Petre note in their edition of *The Wars of Alexander* that there are several hundred three-beat a-verses, and they mention the ongoing debate over whether all three beats are metrical (xxi).

rules, then, are problematic in describing the Alliterative Revival meter, especially the a-verse. His rules have an elegance similar to Cable's basic rule of asymmetry, except that Duggan's rules allow symmetry, too. The only difference between Duggan's rule for the a-verse and b-verse is that the b-verse *must* have one and only one long dip, whereas the a-verse *may* have a sole long dip. Duggan contends that what Cable sees as a rule is merely a tendency:

> Though Cable's rule will do very well to describe the preponderance of a-verses in the corpus, he has proposed a categorical rule for what is merely a normative tendency. Though the scores vary from poem to poem, sixty-five to over 90% of a-verses do indeed have at least two strong dips or three stressed syllables. Nevertheless, the ten to thirty-five percent of such verses that do not answer to Cable's a-verse rule do not otherwise appear aberrant in any way, and are certainly not unacceptable to the poets or scribes.[148]

Duggan despairs that we can ever discern the meter of the a-verse because we simply have too many examples:

> Perhaps most important are the greater size of the Middle English corpus and the considerably greater range of rhythmic verse-types occurring in the manuscripts and editions. One simply cannot tote up which patterns do not occur, since most that might have occurred in fact do occur, but some (or many) of those may well be unmetrical. The problem is to

[148] "Role and Distribution of *–ly* Adverbs," 136.

> establish some means of distinguishing rare but metrical a-verse rhythms from rare and unmetrical ones. Cable's notion of working from patterns of avoidance promises to offer useful evidence for distinguishing rare but metrical a-verse rhythms from rare and unmetrical ones.[149]

Although the a-verse, by nature of being longer, heavier, or both, is more flexible than the b-verse, there is in principle no reason why the metrical rules of the a-verse should not be recoverable by exactly the same procedures that allowed Duggan and Cable to crack the b-verse code. Although Duggan has failed, it remains to be seen whether that failure tells us something about the a-verse or about Duggan's methodological shortcomings.

[149] "Aspects of A-Verse Rhythms," 485-6. He realizes that this limitation may be a modern one: "stated in terms of tendencies, such an a-verse rule permits the metrist or editor to isolate no extant manuscript verse as unmetrical, though we may distinguish common from rare forms. And yet, almost certainly, the poets themselves worked to more demanding constraints. In a number of minority a-verse rhythmic patterns, I am confident that a few are unmetrical, but I am equally confident that in all but a few such cases we lack the evidence that would distinguish the unmetrical from the rare" (482).

CONCLUSION: DATING BY THE RULES

This chapter has brought together a number of phenomena that, taken together, demonstrate how *Troy* is a metrically different kind of poem from the poems of the Alliterative Revival. Some of these differences have become quite famous and rather unfortunately tied to the perceived quality of the poem. Arguably, modern tastes seek something different from medieval ones, and it is fair to say that metrists of the Middle English alliterative long line admire the unpredictability of the *Gawain*-poet more than the seemingly more plodding approach of the *Troy*-poet whose "typical half-lines" populate over 92% of the 14,044 lines of this poem, the longest of the alliterative poems. These lines are considered "soporific" and "monotonous" because they are so much more regular in rhythm than the poems of the Alliterative Revival, despite the fact that they are also inductive; in fact, this regularity is typical of deductive meters, such as iambic pentameter, so the problem is more likely one of expectation, not of performance. We can better appreciate the art of the poet when we stop holding him to rules that he either did not know or follow.

The poet had at least a rudimentary knowledge of the long line; more than half of his b-verses are metrical, and the majority of his a-verses are metrical, too. But he manages somehow to get the meter wrong, when we compare his meter to that of the Revival poems: he overuses a quasi b-verse meter in both the a-verse and the b-verse, overuses the metrical pattern AA/AX, and underuses the three-beat a-verse. He has a tendency for redundant language and an uneasy grasp of the subtleties of final *–e* and

other stress and syllabic doublets. On the other hand, his use of alliteration is quite cunning, and the poem is extant in a manuscript written at least a hundred years after the end of the Revival. All of these features have left us with a poem that superficially looks like it belongs to the Alliterative Revival, and it was certainly written during the one hundred or so years of that period.

The question, though, is when. In their edition of *The Siege of Jerusalem*, Ralph Hanna and David Lawton argue that *Troy* is later than *Siege*: "One can easily imagine this poem [*Troy*] as the work of a fifteenth-century alliterative afficionado; such a dating might well explain the poet's wooden handling of the alliterative long-line and (in sharp contrast to the grammatical intricacies of *The Siege*), his tendency to think in blocks of full lines arranged in repetitive appositives" (xxxvi-xxxvii).[150] Every metrist has a pet poem; we have already seen that. But we also know that at the beginning of the Revival, the meter, stress, and syllabic doublets had to be learned; that the meter was one of such subtlety that it could be reduced to one word, *asymmetry*; that the founders of the Revival had almost certainly died by the end of the fourteenth century; that the latter half of the fourteenth century saw an alarming number of deaths and movement of the population in response to the Plague, war, regime change, and changes in the grammar and phonology on which meter depends. The chances of a living tradition surviving intact in such a climate were slim, and not least for a meter that relied so heavily on the natural language of a bygone era.

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[150] *The Siege of Jerusalem*, Early English Text Society, Original Series, 320 (Oxford, Oxford UP, 2003). They lean on Edward Wilson's insistence on the lateness of the poem, though they disagree with some of his specific points; James Simpson's "The Other Book of Troy" counters Wilson's (and thus Hanna and Lawton's) claim of such late authorship, claiming that *The Siege* draws a passage from *Troy* (405).

The *Troy*-poet, then, might well have been a mimic, a lover of the alliterative long line who arrived late on the scene who was left to figure out at least some of the rules on his own from the disparate group of poems at his disposal; such a scenario explains how the meter could resemble the Revival poems enough to confuse such a large number of metrists. Christine Chism's *Alliterative Revivals* addresses the notion of discontinuity in the tradition from Old English to Middle English, but her argument could very well describe the *Troy*-poet: "I will argue that the alliterative poets . . . knew their insular vernacular traditions sufficiently to read the letters and also to mimic the lineaments . . . whose shapes can be discerned and admired despite their mysterious import." She perceives that Cable's take on Middle English alliterative meter "usefully counters Oakden's emphasis on continuity and accords with my argument that the fourteenth-century alliterative poets were improvising a lost tradition rather than actually following one."[151] Whether or not this is so, one must question whether the *Troy*-poet was mimicking a lost tradition or creating his own.

[151] *Alliterative Revivals*, (Philadelphia, U of Pennsylvania P, 2002), 15 and 27, respectively.

Chapter 4:

The *Gawain*-Poet's Other Rhythm: Medieval Dolnik

Under the influence of writing alliterative verse, the poet wrote *Pearl* in a hybrid form that is part metrical verse, part alliterative line. (Sarah Stanbury, "*Pearl*: Introduction")

It is possible to take for granted the basic structure of the short [wheel] line—one of three chief syllables—and the metrical patterns present fewer difficulties than the alliterative verse of the poem [*Gawain*]. (Marie Borroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 155)

WRITING UNDER THE ALLITERATIVE INFLUENCE

It is impossible to read an article or introduction describing the *Gawain*-poet's prosody without encountering praise of the poetry's elegance and sophistication, cunning and art. Of the four poems in the Cotton MS., *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are assumed to have been composed last because of the exquisite nature of their poetry, both in form and content. *Pearl* is a mathematically precise masterpiece of 101 stanzas,[152] an intricate weaving of metaphor and meter replete with rhyme, alliteration, and repetition, particularly concatenation, which is a way of verbally linking individual stanza ends and stanza groups with line beginnings. *Gawain* is the most widely read poem of the so-called Alliterative Revival, and in no other Middle English poem do we find the native and non-native meters woven together as here. Each of its 101 stanzas,

[152] Some examples of this precision are the 12-line stanzas and the 1212 lines of the poem, 12 being the number of heaven because it was considered the perfect number (there are 12 tribes of Israel, 12 patriarchs, twelve apostles); this interest in numbers extends to *Gawain*, where line 1 is repeated in line 2525 (5 x 5 = pentangle, the most important symbol in the poem).

varying in length from twelve to thirty-seven lines written in the native alliterative long unrhymed line, ends with the one-beat line and four three-beat lines of the so-called bob-and-wheel. The poems share a number of features, including the metrical similarity of the four-stress line of *Pearl* and the three-stress line of the wheels in *Gawain*. These lines are rhymed and alliterative, and they are in a meter different from that of *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and the long lines of *Gawain* itself. The four poems reveal a poet who obviously felt at home in both native and non-native meters.

The two modes can be illustrated from any part of *Gawain*:

x x / x x x / x / x x x / x
Þen he wakenede, and wroth, and to hir warde torned

x x / x x / / x x / x x / x
And vnlouked his yȝe-lyddez, and let as hym wondered,

x / x / x x x / x x / x x / x
And sayned hym, as bi his saȝe þe sauer to worthe,

x / x
with hande.

x / x / x / x
Wyth chynne and cheke ful swete,

x / x / x / x
Boþe quit and red in blande,

x / x / x / x
Ful lufly con ho lete,

x / x / x / x
Wyth lyppez smal laȝande. (ll. 1200-1207)[153]

[153] All lines from SGGK are taken from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, rev. by Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967).

The first three lines are in the native, unrhymed alliterative meter. The short, one-beat bob finishes off the last long line, and is then followed by the four, three-beat wheel lines. In this short section, the metrical principles argued in this chapter have been applied, yielding a perfectly regular bob and wheel. The metrical principles applied to the long lines are argued in Chapter 2; the pattern is here only to show the difference in the two metrical types.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature shared by the four poems is the lack of consensus on their various meters. Sarah Stanbury's "Introduction" to the 2001 TEAMS edition of *Pearl* captures the continued disagreement about its meter; her own opinion appears in the epigraph above and descends from E.V. Gordon's assertion that the *Gawain*-poet did not and perhaps even could not escape the influence of his native meter in crafting *Pearl*'s lines. In fact, Gordon argues that "[m]ost rhymed Middle English verse (apart from Chaucer, Gower, and many of the lyrics) descends from the rhythms of the old alliterative line modified in varying degrees by adaptation to rhyme-schemes" (89). Gordon provides no help in describing how these modifications occur, and we are left with Stanbury's idea that the *Gawain*-poet was writing under the influence of alliterative meter—a notion that undercuts the genius otherwise reflected in the poet's application of various sophisticated devices borrowed from Continental poetry. Given that the poet is demonstrably a metrical virtuoso in both mediums, it becomes apparent that we should question the prosodists, not the poet.

At the other end of the spectrum lie the bobs and wheels, which have been surprisingly neglected, given their metrical similarity to *Pearl*. J.A. Burrow asserts that

the one-stress bob "performs a primarily musical function" that moves the poem from the long alliterative lines to the short rhyming ones of the wheel.[154] He echoes Tolkien and Gordon's opinion that the bob rarely adds any real meaning to the text, and that it may have been an "afterthought of the author's."[155] Marie Borroff explicitly states, as the second epigraph reveals, that we can take the wheels for granted, partly because their meter is less complicated. Unfortunately, she never explains how she came to this conclusion nor how the wheels are any less complicated than the long lines. Nevertheless, Borroff implies that the wheels are related to the long lines that precede them: they "provide an ideal gateway to the metrical study of the long lines," perhaps because they again point to a poet writing under the alliterative influence.[156]

This chapter's argument is based on the scansions of the first 300 lines of *Pearl* and the 505 lines of the bobs and wheels. It offers an explanation of the four-beat meter of *Pearl* and the meter of the bobs and wheels that accounts for what is on the manuscript page and all of the metrical options available, and it is not biased by an attempt to make it fit into either of the two generally assumed traditions of English meter, accentual and syllable-stress. It compares the meter of *Pearl* and the wheels for the first time, and employs the line tightening devices available to poets such a Chaucer and Gower who

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[154] *The Gawain Poet* (Plymouth, Northcote House in association with the British Council, 2001). 53.
[155] To wit: "A striking feature if the bob in *Gawain* is that it seldom adds anything essential to the meaning, and is often distinctly redundant . . . . It is possible that this element of the stanza was an afterthought of the author's, and that the bobs were added after the poem was complete, with a few adjustments" (Borroff 152). *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study,* (New Haven, Yale UP, 1962).
[156] Borroff 155.

also worked in the octosyllable and innovated other meters.[157] It finds that the two rhyming meters are indeed a hybrid of sorts, but one created by a poet who knowingly innovated much as Chaucer did rather than one who remained a slave to one meter and one tradition.

A few lines of *Pearl* establish a rhythm that is both elusive and familiar:

x / x / x x / x /
Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;

x / x x / x / x / x
My body on balke þer bod in sweuen.

x / x / x / x /
My goste is gon in Godeȝ grace

x / x / x / x / x
In auenture þer meruayleȝ meuen.

x x / x x / x / x /
I ne wyste in þis worlde quere þat hit wace,

x x / x / x / x / x
But I knew me keste þer klyfeȝ cleuen; (61-66)[158]

The four beats in each line are indisputable and therefore underlined, and the scansion follows the principles argued in this chapter. According to these principles, lines 61, 62, 65 and 66 contain one disyllabic dip, and lines 63 and 64 perfectly alternate.

[157] Putter and Stokes observe that the poet availed himself of final *–e* in his poetry: "in the language of verse this poet (like his contemporaries Chaucer and Gower and later Hoccleve) seems to have treated syllabic *–e* as a metrical option" (87).
[158] All lines from *Pearl* are taken from *Pearl*, ed. by E.V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1953).

THE PROBLEM WITH *PEARL*

In *English Historical Metrics*, two articles devote their arguments to the prosody of *Pearl*, yet the respective authors present their arguments in two diametrically opposed ways. Richard Osberg argues that *Pearl* belongs in the native alliterative tradition, as revealed in the title, "The Prosody of Middle English 'Pearl' and the Alliterative Lyric Tradition."[159] Hoyt Duggan, on the other hand, insists that *Pearl* was written in the non-native iambic tetrameter, even if scribal transmission subsequently blurred the meter into something less distinctly iambic; in fact, he uses *Pearl* to argue for sweeping editorial emendations that would return Middle English alliterative poems to the poets' hands, rather than leaving them in the scribes'.[160] Osberg and Duggan contribute to a debate concerning the prosody of *Pearl* that has continued with little sign of resolution since the first prosodist sought to characterize *Pearl*'s meter. Perhaps with a sense of this irony, Osberg begins his article with a summary of the two positions, two positions that have "oddly little middle ground" (150).[161]

The problem is paradoxical: while metrists almost universally laud *Pearl* as a technical masterpiece, they almost universally correct the meter as it stands on the manuscript page, because they want to categorize *Pearl*'s prosody as either native accentual verse or non-native syllable-accent verse. Osberg apparently cannot accept that an iambic line could allow so many anapests or two-syllable dips and sees the poem as

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[159] In *English Historical Metrics*, ed. by C.B. McCulley and J.J. Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 150-174.
[160] "Libertine Scribes and Maidenly Editors: Meditations on Textual Criticism and Metrics," in *English Historical Metrics*, ed. by C.B. McCulley and J.J. Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 219-37.
[161] Osberg quotes Margaret Williams to support this assertion, note 3, p. 167.

hemistichic.[162] He turns a deaf ear to the basic alternating rhythm of each line and forces the majority of them into hemistichs. He also perceives clashing stresses where none exist, yet another result of the tin ear metrists who align *Pearl* with native verse display for the music of the line. For example, Osberg offers these scansions as evidence of clashing stress (consecutive s s or S S):

	s s w	w w S w S w
936	Now tech me	to þat myry mote
	w w S S	w s w S w
30	þer hit doun drof	in moldeȝ dunne
	w w S S w	w S w w S
1186	þat þou so stykeȝ	in garlande gay[163]

Osberg's system of notation captures three levels of stress: weak (w), strong (S), and an intermediary stress (s), where (S) and (s) both show points of ictus. Reducing his scansions to a binary of stress (/) and dip (x) yields:

	/ / x	x x / x / x
936	Now tech me	to þat myry mote
	x x / /	x / x / x
30	þer hit doun drof	in moldeȝ dunne
	x x / / x	x / x x /
1186	þat þou so stykeȝ	in garlande gay

In these scansions, the second half-lines show the "tendency toward footing" that Osberg acknowledges but explains away as a product of line-final rhyme, "even against lexical

[162] E.V. Gordon used the hemistich argument to conclude that "the line of *Pearl* is probably more truly understood as a modification of the alliterative line than as a basically French line partly assimilated to the alliterative tradition" (91). Duggan's criticism of this argument is valid.
[163] Osberg, "Prosody of *Pearl*," 152.

prominence or alliterative patterns."[164] In the face of a "tendency" so strong that Duggan quantifies it as occurring in more that 90 percent of the lines and therefore uses it to buttress his own argument,[165] Osberg denies that the meter always alternates and thus avoids as many single-syllable dips as he can, thereby creating the clashing stresses discussed above (222). Similarly, lines that fall into hemistichs are the exception, not the rule he tries to make them, and the hemistichs he creates are not natural. Here is the alternating scansion of these three lines, scansions that Duggan and this study both believe to be correct:

	x / x / x / x / x	
936	Now tech me to þat myry mote	
	x / x / x / x / x	
30	þer hit doun drof in moldeȝ dunne[166]	
	x / x / (x) x / x /	
1186	þat þou so styke ȝ in garlande gay	

These lines use a regularly alternating meter.[167] The problem is that the alternation is not always perfectly iambic, as line 1186 perhaps demonstrates. The historical final *–eȝ* is

[164] Osberg 151.

[165] Of the 300 lines scanned, just under 6% have a disyllable in the final inter-ictic interval, which is consistent with Duggan's results, if not his conclusions.

[166] Interestingly, Duggan also selects line 30 as an unambiguous example of the poet's use of iambic tetrameter (224). This line is a bad one from which to draw conclusions, since the first three words are ambiguous hierarchically and can only be deciphered by comparing their meter to more metrically obvious lines. Luick, 'Stabreime', pp. 397–9, argues that it is usually the verb and not the particle or adverb that takes the beat, which perhaps explains the inversion of the two here; Chapter 2 argues that the entire phrasal verb can receive ictus in the a-verse.

[167] If this meter were in the alliterative tradition, then it could allow for Osberg's scansion of *now*, which as a space-time marker would normally not receive ictus, to do so as a result of inversion. In *Pearl*, though, inversion never trumps meter at the metrical level, though performance could be different.

most likely syncopated here,[168] as Chaucer and other poets of iambic meters tended to use inflectional endings along with final *–e* as it suited the meter, either expanding such an ending to create the requisite single alternating dip, or reducing it.

Duggan argues that *Pearl* is rhymed iambic tetrameter. His argument seems to develop thus: because it cannot be the meter of the alliterative long line, as evidenced in the final scansions above, and with four beats per line and the "fundamentally iambic form of most verses," particularly in the final feet, it must therefore be iambic tetrameter.[169] The facts that Duggan lists are indeed indicative of the non-native alternating or template meters imported from the Continent. The alliteration in *Pearl* and a debatable number of long dips are the only features it shares with the long alliterative line found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and in the former, the alliteration is demonstrably ornamental; in the first 300 lines, 32 lines have no alliteration. More than ten percent of these lines, then, lack the structuring feature that has given alliterative poetry its name. Even more telling, though, is the poet's playful use of alliteration when it does occur: alliteration may occur on 0, 2, 3, or all 4 ictuses and in all possible patterns,[170] which serves no structural purpose except to establish the line, and not the half-line, as the fundamental unit of verse in this poem.

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[168] See Ten Brink, ¶ 259, page 171 for syncopation of second-person singular endings.
[169] Duggan 224.
[170] Duggan's argument against alliteration as a structuring device coincides with this latter point. He uses the opening line of *Pearl* to show that alliteration and metrical stress do not coincide in *Pearl* as they do in the alliterative long line, because he scans *pleasaunt* as stressed on the second syllable. In other words, he points to places where alliteration occurs in the dip rather than on the beat. He apparently assumes apocope of *–e* on *perle* to support an iambic reading of this line. As Duggan indicates, this poet makes use of alliteration on unaccented syllables, much as the Lexus slogan does: "the passionate pursuit of perfection." Accented or not, alliteration is pleasing to the ear.

The problem with *Pearl*, then, is that the meter defies definition in this traditional bifurcation of metrical schools, which has left many metrists "hunting for the iamb."[171] The truth about the meter of *Pearl* (and the bobs and wheels of *Gawain*) lies elsewhere. As Ad Putter and Myra Stokes note as a caution to their acceptance of Duggan's argument for iambic tetrameter, "if 'iambic' is to be used *stricto sensu*, the case for iambic meter in *Pearl* and the bob and wheel of *SGGK* would also need to show that the poet tends to avoid sequences of two unstressed syllables and/or would have reduced such sequences by traditional prosodic methods such as syncope, elision, apocope, and synizesis."[172] It is the argument of this chapter that the poet probably reduces many syllables through the prosodic methods found in contemporary alternating meters, yet he does *not* strictly avoid sequences of two unstressed syllables,[173] hence the prolonged argument most recently revisited by Osberg and Duggan. The meter of these poems is what Marina Tarlinskaja would call dolnik or strict stress-meter, and what Kristin Hanson would call mixed meter.[174] I have chosen to call it medieval dolnik, for the simple reason that there can be no confusion concerning terms. Tarlinskaja's definition of dolnik describes what we find in *Pearl*: a deductive meter that has features of both the native accentual meter and the syllable-accent or template meter imported from the Continent.

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171 Marina Tarlinskaja, *Strict Stress-Meter in English Poetry*, (Calgary: U of Calgary P, 1993), 20.

172 "Spelling, Grammar and Metre in the Works of the *Gawain*-Poet," *Parergon*, 18 (2000), 77-95, p. 78 note 3. Putter and Stokes also call the meter of the wheels iambic (78, 84). In 'The Distribution of Infinitives in *–e* and *–en* in Some Middle English Alliterative Poems', *Medium Ævum,* 74 (2005), 221-47, Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter posit that *Pearl* is "not in alliterative metre but in rhymed stanzaic verse, with four-stress lines in loose iambic pentameter" (226).

173 It is likely that the poet did on some occasions avoid double offbeats (e.g., in the wheels of *Gawain*, the shorter form *dele* for *devil* in line 2188, which is only used here, and the use of the shortened *mas* for *makes* in line 106).

174 Hanson, Kristin, *Resolution in Modern Meters*, Diss., Stanford University, 1992.

The underlying alternating rhythm indicates its debt to Continental forms, while its inter-ictic dips of two syllables show its debt to accentual meter.[175]

[175] For a fuller definition, please see Tarlinskaja, 192 ff.

WHAT WOULD CHAUCER DO?

What might seem an irrelevant question captures two important elements in establishing the medieval dolnik as a third alternative: 1) as Chapter 1 argues, asking what Chaucer did makes sense, given that his prosody is the most studied of any medieval English poet, and 2) Chaucer might have been a maverick in developing the iambic pentameter, but his use of elision, syncope, apocope, and synizesis were not his own invention.[176] An overarching conclusion of this study is that Chaucer's contemporaries knew what he would do and did it, not because they were lemmings (certainly the older John Gower is exempt from such an epithet), but because these were the poetic practices of the fourteenth and perhaps even the thirteenth centuries.[177]

This argument only becomes interesting when one includes the alliterative poets, who most modern prosodists think worked in a tradition that had no use for these devices and wrote in dialects in which final *–e* had eroded. The former assumption, most memorably presented in W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's seminal article "The Concept of Meter," is demonstrably fallacious, as Chapter 1 showed. For now, it is worth noting that Wimsatt and Beardsley canonize iambic pentameter, "the great English art tradition (Chaucer to Tennyson)," as they relegate other meters to minor roles.[178] In an

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[176] The same devices were used in the much earlier alliterative Harley lyrics, for example, and existed in the language of the time.

[177] E. Talbot Donaldson's article "Chaucer's Final *–e*" provides the best summary and most fascinating metaphor of the prolonged death of final *–e* in spoken English, 1110-5, which leads him to conclude: "it is necessary to assume that some one in London in Chaucer's time was still pronouncing his *e*'s, and that Chaucer still considered them a living part of the language—organic and vital" (1121).

[178] W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Concept of Meter: An Exercise in Abstraction," *PMLA,* 74 (1959), 592.

odd exercise explaining what is and is not iambic pentameter, they criticize one hypothetical example where "one shift of accent throws us immediately into the anapestic gallop": *A little advice is a dangerous thing*[179]. Anapests are thus undesirable in the iambic line, unless they are accepted substitutions.

The existence of anapestic-looking two-syllable dips has created enough confusion that no consensus has been reached on the meter of *Pearl*.[180] Part of the problem has been the assumption that the *Gawain*-poet could only write in the native meter, as discussed above. The difference between poets of the alliterative meter versus the template meters is that the former relied much more heavily on the older forms of words and were more apt to pronounce final *–e*; Chapter 2 demonstrates how the *Gawain*-poet used elision, syncope, and apocope to trim b-verses of unmetrical syllables. It is hardly surprising, then, that he employed precisely the same arsenal as his template-writing contemporaries did in the bobs and wheels and in *Pearl*. In other words, fourteenth-century English poets all had the same bag of tricks at their disposal, and the evidence of this ubiquitous set of tools lies in the b-verse of the alliterative long line, the medieval dolnik, and the emerging iambic lines. The b-verse requires the lowest use of elision, etc., because it contains only two beats, three inter-ictic gaps, and either the first or the second gap must be long. The iambic line requires the highest, because of the higher number of required one-syllable inter-ictic intervals.

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[179] Wimsatt and Beardsley 593.

[180] The meter of the alliterating Harley Lyrics has caused a similar muddled response, where Osberg again argues for that the native influence is the stronger. Chapter 5 challenges that conclusion. See Osberg's "Alliterative Technique in the Lyrics of MS Harley 2253," *Modern Philology*, 82 (1984), 125-55.

All of the poets chose from a variety of linguistic options when employing elision, syncope, apocope, and synizesis—or not, as the case may have been. They also availed themselves of historical final *–e* as needed. The few choices that have survived into the modern era are now seen as relics of a bygone era: *o'er* for over and *e'er* for ever are good examples. It is both easier and safer to first review poetic license and look at what Chaucer would do to achieve his decasyllabic lines. [181]

In detailing a prosody that accounts for Chaucer's meter, Bernhard ten Brink provides an exhaustive chapter that explains the proper reading of Chaucer that accounts for final *–e* and elision. The scansions presented throughout this study result from applying his rules to both rhymed and unrhymed alliterative poems (and to both sides of the caesura in the latter), in order to be consistent and thus render the main hypothesis of this study plausible. The choice of ten Brink perhaps requires some defense, since his abilities as a prosodist have been attacked by several more recent prosodists.[182] Alan T. Gaylord, in particular, asserts: "As a prosodist . . . he did not develop a method which could do all it should" (32). He considers ten Brink's work antiquated: "The effect is like examining some bulky engine in a museum, once designed, we are told, to perform some useful task, but whose precise functions and workings are now obscure" (32). While ten Brink's analysis is bulky in its laborious detail and vocabulary, these characteristics make it no less useful to a study that is interested in knowing those details, as the present study

[181] As Donaldson notes, Chaucer had "a freedom of action accorded to few other poets" (1115).
[182] Donaldson relies on Ten Brink's work throughout his article, and explicitly calls his prosody of Chaucer "preferable" (1102).

is. Very few prosodists get everything right; ten Brink excels in his understanding of the phonological shape of Chaucer's lines.

Ten Brink's Chapter III, "Structure of the Verse and Stanza," offers several useful ideas. I have applied the following eliding properties to all of the lines scanned in this dissertation: final *–e* elides with words beginning with vowels or *h* (par. 269); apocope of final *–e* on personal and possessive pronouns, such as *hire* (par. 260) and in words that end in *e-consonant-e* (eCe) in their base form, such as *manere* (par. 257); and *synizesis* and *synaeresis*[183] in words of Romance origin create semi-vowels, e.g., *studie* (par. 268). Here are some examples from *Pearl*:

x / x / x / x / x
85 The adubbemente of þo downeȝ dere

Line 85 shows elision of *the* and the first syllable of *adubbement* and can be regularized if we assume elision of initial *a* in *adubbement* or assume the shorter form 'dubbement' which appears in lines 109 and 121 with the phrase "The dubbement."

x / x / x / x /
197 Al blysnande whyt watȝ hir beau biys

This line contains two examples of apocope of final *–e*: one on *blysnande*, and the other on *hire*, which the scribe consistently does without the *-e*.[184]

There are other examples of the many devices that the English poets used to tighten template meter through poetic license. For instance, Duggan presents a useful list

[183] I use Seymour Chatman here; he defines synizesis as the monosyllabification or "reduction of contiguous syllables to a single nucleus," and synaeresis as "the consonantizing of a vowel (usually into /y-/ or /w-/, or the loss of syllabicity of a syllabic consonant, such that it clusters with a following vowel rather than standing alone as a syllable" (144). Either process would cause a reduction of two syllables into one.
[184] In *Gawain*, the only written form is *hir*.

of syllabic and stress doublets in *Pearl* (*neuer*/*ner*, *euer*/*ere*, *oþer*/*or*, *syþen*/*syn*, *ouer*/*ore*), which poets for centuries used as metrical accordions to meet the demands of the meter.[185] The *Gawain*-poet probably used synezisis, a kind of elision that combines a vowel and a semi-vowel into one syllable in a line of poetry. This poet plays with the possibilities of *–y* as a semi-vowel, most obviously in the word *oryent(e)*. Here is an example from *Pearl*:

/ x / x x / x x /
3 Oute of oryent I hardyly saye

In this line, the poet probably uses synaeresis to tighten what would be a three-syllable dip. This is a line that is impossible to elide into iambic tetrameter, with its pair of two-syllable dips, the kind of line that proponents of the native strong stress school pounce on and the adherents of the syllable-accent school ignore or simply write off as scribal. Here is another example from *Pearl*:

x / x / x / x /
192 A precios pyece in perleȝ pyȝt

This line perhaps shows in *pyece* the kind of synaeretic reduction that creates a monosyllabic dip of the *ye* combination (though it is also likely that this reduction had simply occurred in the language) alongside an *–es* ending whose sounding is justified by etymology and required metrically.

Yet just because elision must occur with some semi-vowels does not mean it has to occur in every case. This line from *Pearl* reveals that principle:

[185] Duggan, "Libertine Scribes," 224-5.

x / x / x / x /
82 Wern precious perleȝ of oryente

This line's expansion of *oryente* is reminiscent of the first line of the Christmas carol "We Three Kings," and in both cases, the meter demands that the syllables be fully separated and pronounced. The scansion of this line demonstrates other kinds of tightening, such as Chaucer would have employed, to create as many strictly alternating lines as are possible: synizesis reduces *precious* to two syllables, and a syncopated ending on *perleȝ* reduces it to one syllable. These latter two decisions reflect choices permissible not via poetic license but rather through language change, and demonstrate that audiences across England recognized both full and syncopated forms of many words. This formed a living set of doublets, mostly involving the vexed issue of final *-e* for the poets of this time period, an unparalleled treasure trove to fulfill the demands of all meters.

Language change provided another source from which these poets could choose metrically expeditious forms. Both poems demonstrate that the poet occasionally used forms with historical *–e*, even if the scribe was unaware of them or simply neglected to record them. Borroff notes this wheel line:

x / x / x /
532 Til meȝel-mas mone

Here the pronunciation of organic final *–e* in *mas* (< OE *mæsse*) would restore the duple meter, and there are many such lines in both poems. Borroff and Duggan explain this metrical requirement in a way that begs the question: the *–e* is there because it must be there, and they each list examples of such lines where the *–e* must be expressed. They

both argue that the *Gawain*-poet "occasionally used historically motivated forms when the metre demanded them."[186] Duggan argues that because there are lines that demonstrate the omission of *–e*, final *–e* was silenced in this poet's prosody.[187] While both prosodists are right in claiming that the poet avoids clashing stress in the respective poems, neither one presents a theory for this phenomenon that explains it. The plausible reason for the occasional expression and omission is easily found in Chaucer's poems, where in certain words and under certain conditions, final *–e* could be expressed or omitted as the meter demanded. Because Duggan, Borroff, and many other metrists deny non-native influences, as exemplified in Chaucer's verse, on the poems of the Alliterative Revival, they miss vital connections that explain the meter.[188]

To be perfectly clear, I have executed a metrical slash-and-burn on these lines of poetry: I have syncopated and apocopated every medial or final *–e* that Chaucer could have syncopated or apocopated as one of his options. I have not taken into account some other possible tightening measures (slurring, contracted versus non-contracted forms), since it is not entirely clear in these cases whether we are dealing with metrical variants or with scribal versus authorial variants.[189] My goal has been to clear all ambiguity so

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[186] Duggan, "Libertine Scribes," 226.

[187] Duggan, "Libertine Scribes," notes 11 and 24.

[188] Borroff explicitly argues against comparing the wheels to Chaucer's meter: "To appeal to Chaucerian verse is to assume what has not been proved: that the *Gawain*-poet and Chaucer composed according to the same metrical principles. It also disregards what historical phonology tells us about the differing treatment of *–e* in the spoken language of the two poets. A priori, we should expect *–e* to be sounded much less frequently in the verse of *Gawain* than in that of Chaucer" (157-8).

[189] Slurring could have applied to six lines: 116, 117, 122, 203, 268, and 291. Slurring can occur between an unaccented final syllable containing a weak *–e* and the following word, if it begins on a vowel or *h* (188).

Other less familiar forms of syncope and apocope occur in Chaucer but probably not in *Pearl*. In line 16, the syncopation of *heuen* to *heen* could make the line perfectly iambic:

that only inarguably unelidable dips remain—to do not only what Chaucer did, but also what he could do. As a case in point, Chaucer uses *perle* six times in his poetry, and only once in the singular.[190] In each of these cases, final *–e* is pronounced. Given the small size of this sample, and based on Chaucer's practice with similar words, I have considered the final *–e* on *perle* a metrical option, not requirement.[191] This decision has immediate effect in that the very first line of the poem becomes perfectly iambic:

/ x / x / x /
1 Perle pleasaunte to prynces paye

Duggan asserts without proof that *pleasaunte* is an example of alliteration and metrical stress not coinciding in this meter, as they are expected to do in the native lines.[192] Indeed, we can see in Chaucer that *pleasaunte* is one of many words whose stress can shift depending on the meter. This shift to second-syllable stress more often occurs at line end, but the medial shift shown in line 1 is not uncommon. Apocope of *perle*'s final *–e*, which Duggan apparently assumes but does not explain, establishes the octosyllable

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x / (x) x / x / x / x
16 And heuen my happ and al my hele

In line 293, I decided that the poet did not employ aphaeresis, a kind of contraction, to achieve duple meter:

x (x) / x / x / x / x
293 7ou ne woste in worlde quat on dotȝ mene

Here, *ne woste* could combine to make *noste*, a possible combination in the native word stock (179). Finally, in line 187, the poet probably did not use ecthlipsis to elide a closed *–e*, or an *–e* that is not a weak ending:

x / (x) x / x / x /
187 Lest ho me eschaped þat I þer chos

This line could combine *me eschaped* into *m'eschaped*, with the past tense ending syncopated to fulfill metrical demands.

[190] Larry D Benson, *A Glossarial Concordance to the Riverside Chaucer*, 2 vols, (New York, Garland, 1993), 653. I have used this concordance to check every word in this study.

[191] I have applied this principle to similar words, such as *herte*.

[192] Given that alliteration is pleasing to the ear whether it is stressed or not, I question whether all alliterating syllables must be stressed, particularly in the b-verse, where the meter is so rigid. But this is a discussion deserves its own study and cannot be addressed here.

as the underlying template meter for this medieval dolnik.[193] The first two lines of *Pearl* are perfectly alternating and establish the fundamental template meter of this poem. In these lines, apocope on the final *–e* of *were* helps maintain the rhythm. This apocope does not occur in the alliterative long lines, where the poet, for example, deliberately placed *were* at line ends in order to deliver the requisite final unaccented syllable on the b-verse.[194] In the wheels and *Pearl*, *were* seems never to be disyllabic in mid-line, though we cannot be sure whether it has two syllables when it appears at the end of a line, as it does in these wheel lines:

x / x / x / x?
320 So did alle þat þer were

/ x x / x / x?
871 Wheþen in worlde he were

There are many such examples that show metrical choices that accord with Chaucer's.

It is wise to demonstrate just how thoroughly my scansions eschew the rules of the alliterative long line argued in Chapter 2, as defined by Thomas Cable and which have proven to be the most robust rules for discerning the native meter. I have syncopated plural and third person singular endings in *–es* when I could justify this choice either by example or analogy:

x / x / x / x x /
23 O moul þou marreȝ a myry iuele

[193] *Perl(e)* occurs in 26 lines in the lines I have scanned (11. 1-300): 1, 12, 24, 36, 41, 48, 53, 60, 82, 192, 193, 202, 204, 207, 216, 219, 221, 228, 229, 240, 241, 242, 255, 258, 272, and 282. Of these, the final *-e* is required to avoid clashing stress in the phrase *perleȝ piȝt* in 192, 193, 240, and 241. The final *-e* could elide in 41, 202, 216, 219, 258, and 272. The remaining sixteen lines would have either one or no two-syllable dips if *perle* were pronounced *perl*, as it is spelled in 53 and 228.
[194] Putter and Stokes, "Spelling, Grammar and Metre in the Works of the *Gawain*-Poet," 92.

The same choices applied to–*ed* of the simple past:

x / x / x / x /
4 Ne proued I neuer her precios pere

Despite all of this tightening—more pervasive than what Duggan either proposes or acknowledges—I cannot rid this poem of enough disyllabic dips such that the London poets would recognize it as their innovated meter. From the first 300 lines of *Pearl*, 92 lines contain at least one two-syllable dip that is unelidable. That is almost 31% of the lines, about a third of the total. But that number does not tell the whole story.

BEHIND *GAWAIN*'S BOBS AND WHEELS

Borroff presents the most comprehensive analysis of these lines, though she focuses on the wheels and not the bobs.[195] These five ending lines offer closure to each stanza by presenting the audience a kind of metrical refrain.[196] The long lines that precede each bob and wheel are written in an *inductive* meter, which means that the meter varies enough that the audience can never guess what the precise rhythm will be in each line, and the alliteration serves as a structuring device for speaker and audience. Each line, then, is a surprise, and the poetry works because the meter closely mirrors the rhythm of natural language and the natural hierarchies of lexical items such as nouns over functional items such as prepositions. The bobs and wheels, on the other hand, are written in a deductive meter, which has the opposite effect on the audience. *Deductive* meter creates a very different listening experience because the metrical rhythm, once established, trumps the rhythm of natural language; the rhythm is knowable and predictable in each line. This balance of the two meters in *Gawain* keeps the ear entertained, and these small patches of deductive verse provide an oasis of the expected to delight and reenergize a listening audience.

The bob is the shortest of all lines and contains a single stress, and is followed by the four longer lines of the wheel, each of which contains three stresses. The 101 bobs

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[195] The articles of note are Oliver Farrar Emerson, "Imperfect Lines in Pearl and the Rimed Parts of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," *Modern Philology* 19 (1921), 131-41, and Georges Bourcier, "Quelques Remarques sur les Rimes de *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Etudes anglaises* 47 (1994), 132-46.
[196] Brogan, Terry Vance F, *Three Models for English Verse: Inquiries in Metatheory*, Diss, The University of Texas at Austin, 1982.

are of interest because they are the connective tissue between the inductive unrhymed alliterative verse and the deductive rhymed alliterative wheels.[197] They cross the space between the inductive and deductive meters and bridge the two opposing metrical types. In terms of content, they complete the thought of the preceding long line. They provide the a-rhyme to the wheel, and the archetypal bob is two syllables that resemble an iamb. Seventy-nine of the bobs have the alternating rhythm **x / x**; lexically, the bobs are short phrases comprised of a preposition + noun, the preposition *to* plus the infinitive, an adjective + noun, or a conjunction + a noun or adjective.

The basic metrical pattern of the bob, the alternating rhythm of **x / x**, is the same basic metrical pattern of the wheels, but there are variations in the bob that are interesting precisely because they connect the two dissimilar meters. For instance, in 21 of the bobs (20% of total), the rhythm is x/, lacking the final unstressed syllable.[198] The stressed words in these bobs differ from the stressed words in the archetypal bobs in that they are words that never end b-verses but can occur at the ends of a-verses and elsewhere in the unrhymed lines. The rhythm of the bobs is deductive, and the meter captures both a- and b-verse rhythms.

Three of the bobs offer an interesting variation on the alternating rhythm, in that they allow a long dip in the first inter-ictic gap:

	x x /
806	auinant

[197] One hundred and one bobs were probably important to a poet who was interested in 101.
[198] 80, 174, 227, 274, 296, 318, 511, 531, 686, 806, 1041, 1173, 1596, 1618, 1663, 1714, 2042, 2254, 2279, 2304, 2326.

x x / x
1145 of þe best

x x / x
2042 ofer knyffe[199]

By themselves, these three bobs are not enough to argue that the meter of the wheels is not strictly alternating; however, in combination with the use of two-syllable dips in the wheels, it becomes necessary to redefine the meter the poet chose for the wheel lines.

As stated previously, the points of ictus in both kinds of lines are uniform: the small bobs contain one beat, the wheels three. No prosodist will dispute this point, but this is only half of the story, as revealed in the final bobs above. What is more interesting is how the poet presents the whole lines, particularly the unstressed syllables. Unfortunately, how the poet approached the dips calls into question the status of final *–e* both in his dialect and poetic lexicon and his use of the poetic devices such as elision used by his contemporaries, including Chaucer. Borroff remains reluctant to grant the poet the same use of final *–e* that Chaucer had. She acknowledges that two sets of rhyme in the wheels, "for soþe" and "to þe" in ll. 413 and 415 and "waþe" and "ta þe" in ll. 2355 and 2357 unequivocally rely on historical final *–e*, and in much the same way as Chaucer uses these historical final *–e*'s in his verse.[200] Borroff, despite these rhymes, denies that they provide evidence for historical final *–e* in the poem: "whereas *–e* was still sounded in the second half of the fourteenth century in Chaucer's London, it had ceased to be sounded in the Northwestern Midland dialect region of the *Gawain*-poet by

[199] Borroff's rhyme evidence is incomplete: the rhyme shows this must have been dative *knyue*; cf. *staf* and *stave*. Final *–e* extends to some dative forms.
[200] Borroff 155.

the middle of the century . . . . these rhymes must have represented an obsolete mode of pronunciation."[201] Borroff conflates poetic and spoken language when they in fact differ, and she ignores the salient point that these changes to the English language were neither so decisive nor so thoroughgoing. M. L. Samuels, in discussing Langland's use of final *–e*, argues this latter point: "in the late xiv century in southern England the use of *–e* depended on varying conditions of stress and register, and the individual usage of an author cannot be established on the evidence of when and where he lived."[202]

More specifically, Borroff insists upon metrically aligning the *Gawain*-poet's use of final *-e* with *Cursor Mundi*, which predates *Gawain* by at least fifty years, rather than Chaucer's use because the former is closer in dialect area and thus "it may be expected to illustrate something of the metrical tradition from which the rhymed wheels of *Gawain* is derived."[203] Borroff's metrical theory relies utterly on the assumption that the poet's linguistic resources were confined to a much more ending-eroded spoken dialect, a purely provincial one in which final *–e* had vanished, and could not at all resemble or borrow from a contemporary dialect in London, where Chaucer wrote. Such an approach is hopelessly blinkered; surely, the poet learned the norms and deviations allowable to the verse-form upon learning the verse-form itself.[204] As Tarlinskaja argues, "Poets usually choose from the meters they find in their poetic tradition, and they more or less closely

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[201] ibid.

[202] "Langland's Dialect," *Medium Aevum*, 54 (1985), 232-247. 243. In the next sentence, Samuels continues: "If there is no holograph, the only other possible evidence is the author's practice in writing syllabic metre."

[203] Borroff 144.

[204] Chaucer's verse readily reveals a number of stress and linguistic doublets that show English a various stages of change, and he did not hesitate to use the most metrically expeditious form.

follow the accepted regulations."[205] The argument that follows strives to demonstrate what the *Gawain*-poet perceived those "accepted regulations" to be.

The following scansions follow the previous ones of *Pearl* in applying the most typical instances of elision, syncope, and apocope that Chaucer would have accepted in his lines. Again, the application of Chaucer's phonology and prosody to the *Gawain*-poet's meter may be extreme and even inaccurate, but in this case it proves that even shorn of syllables via syncope and apocope, as applied in *Pearl*, the wheels cannot be iambic trimeter; there are simply too many disyllabic dips. With three ictuses per wheel line, there are 4 spaces for possible dips: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4. Of these, only dip 4 cannot be a long dip. The wheel lines can have 0-2 syllables in the anacrusis and 0-1 syllable at line end. The first wheel line could have been written by Chaucer:

x / x / x / x
16 Where werre and wrake and wonder

The metrical pattern accounts for the elision typical to the non-native meters of the time. The alliterative pattern is ornamental rather than structural, occurring even on an unstressed syllable, and here it helps reinforce the regular alternation of syllables and create an expectation of a rhythm typical to deductive meters.

The second wheel line, however, would not have been written by Chaucer:

x / x x / x / x
17 Bi syþes hatz wont þerinne

Chaucer and his peers would not have allowed a long dip as readily as this poet seems to do. Of the two remaining lines of this wheel, line 18 resembles line 17 but has the long

[205] Tarlinskaja 10.

dip in the anacrusis, while line 19 resembles line 16 with its perfect alternation of dip and stress. Thus, in the very first wheel, the poet establishes a meter that, while it is deductive, differs from Chaucer's meter enough to need its own description.

It is worthwhile to look at other wheel lines that establish the archetypal metrical template uses alternating beats, though the poet will allow a second syllable in the occasional dip. The meter of these lines sometimes promotes functional words such as prepositions and demotes lexical words such as adjectives and nouns; the rhythm rocks the words away from natural linguistic stress in order to achieve the desired and expected meter. Here are examples of wheel lines that follow this three-ictus template exactly;

x / x / x /
1149 Gret rurd in þat forest

This line accomplishes three shifts from natural linguistic stress: first, the adjective *gret*[206] is demoted to an unstressed syllable; second, *þat* is promoted to a beat; and third, the meter shifts the stress on *forest* from the first to the second syllable. Line 1207 demonstrates another example of the meter rocking the rhythm away from natural stress and from the confluence of beat and alliteration:

x / x / x /
1207 wyth lyppeȝ smal laȝande

And here is one more example:

x / x / x /
1317 þe alder and þe yonge

[206] It could be argued that *gret*, similar to other quantifiers, did not have strong linguistic stress, but as an adjective it is a lexical and not functional item, as *þat* is, and in speech would be expected to receive more stress than the latter.

This line shows promotion of the conjunction *and* to a position of ictus. It is important to note that the long lines only rarely allow these types of promotions and demotions; as an inductive meter, the alliterative long line must work more fully with what the audience expects from natural linguistic stress.

Another category of wheel lines contains those that use strictly alternating stress as a result of elision. Here are some examples of lines that fit the archetypal pattern as a result of such poetic devices; I have indicated the elided syllables with a •:

x / • x / • x / x
16 Where werre and wrake and wonder

There are many instances of such elisions that tighten the line and thus cause it to conform to the template. The following line is interesting because it employs a different kind of elision, syncope, in which a syllable is compressed and thus a sound is lost in the middle of a word, in this case, *letteres* is pronounced with two syllables, not three, perhaps losing its middle syllable. Note 35 in the 1967 edition of SGGK points out that this line in particular comments on the poet's use of alliteration, so it is no surprise that this line conforms precisely with the archetypal template of strictly alternating stresses.

x / x / • x / x
35 with lel letteres loken

Along with the syncope already discussed, this line does not have a clashing stress between *lel* and *letteres* because *lel* is plural, and thus has an historical final *–e*. It is also not surprising that the poet uses alliteration to ornament this line; 219 of the 404 wheel lines, or 54%, have alliteration on at least two of the three ictuses in the line.

In fact, sometimes the lines end without this final weak syllable, which would not be possible in the b-verse of the long line:

x / x / x /
276 And sayd Sir cortays kny3t

It is also possible to find headless lines, which lack a weak syllable at the beginning, though they often adhere to this strict alternating stress template:

/ x / x / x
1417 He3 with hunte 3 hornez

In sum, the poet is very capable of following this strict metrical template while employing the poetic devices accepted and even expected in this deductive meter.

It is impossible, however, to call this meter iambic trimeter. Quite often, the wheel lines admit a single long dip of two syllables in one or more of the unstressed metrical positions; these dips are a fact of the meter and exist independent of the existence of final *–e* or any other historical aspect of the language:

x x / x / x /
1237 3e ar welcum to my cors

The previous line shows a two-syllable dip in the first unstressed position, along with the promotion of the preposition *to* to satisfy the metrical rhythm. Forty-two lines, or about 10%, have a two-syllable dip in this first position.

x / x x / x /
1419 Vncoupled among þo þornes

The previous line allows a two-syllable dip in the second unstressed position. Seventy-four lines, or roughly 18%, share this feature. The poet much less frequently allowed for a two-syllable dip in the third unstressed position:

x / x / x x /
1043 To holde lenger þe kny3t

Even allowing for syncope of the *–es* ending, gap 3 contains a two-syllable dip. Seventeen lines, or 4%, have a disyllabic interval in gap 3. The poet also composed lines containing two two-syllable intervals, which can be found in lines 339, 341, 362, 464, 1505, 1577, 1842, 2186, 2282, and 2477. Line 339 demonstrates that two disyllabic gaps do not interfere with the alternating meter:

/ x x / x x / x
339 Gawan[207] þat sat bi þe quene

Of the 404 wheel lines, 279 lines or 69.5% display the template meter, and 123 or 30.4% contain at least one disyllabic dip.

[207] Some metrists would argue that *Gawain* should be scanned x/ for metrical reasons, but there is no obvious reason for stress shift in the first word of the first wheel line; such stress shifts normally occur at the ends of lines.

MEDIEVAL DOLNIK

Tarlinskaja's work on the dolnik provides a useful foundation to discuss the prosody of at least one poem, *Pearl*, that would otherwise continue to be a source of considerable argument among metrists. Nevertheless, I find it necessary to adjust Tarlinskaja's definition to fit the medieval context, not least because she herself considers *Pearl* "almost iambic" and thus too regular to be dolnik.[208] Even by her own definition, *Pearl* is dolnik, if barely. In the iambic tetrameter and four-ictic dolnik, there are four beats or ictuses. This study and Tarlinskaja's are interested not in the ictuses but in the unaccented syllables surrounding them. There are three gaps or dips between the ictuses; an anacrusis may precede them, and a final dip may follow. Tarlinskaja's argument is based on the inter-ictic intervals, which are labeled 1, 2, and 3 in the model below (in which / indicates stress or ictus):

0/1/2/3/E

On the surface, *Pearl* is consistent with her conclusions concerning these dips: the anacruses contain 0-2 syllables, the inter-ictic dips 1-2, and the final dip 0-1. The ending gap, marked E, can only contain 0-1 syllables and is therefore not included in dolnik tabulations, which count disyllabic gaps.

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[208] "More regular forms, almost iambic, occurred in the verse of the English lettered clergy familiar with Medieval Latin syllabo-tonic poetry, as were, obviously, the authors of 'The Owle and the Nightingale' or 'The Pearl.'" This is the "new Germanic verse form, "a hybrid" and an "intermediary between accentual and syllabo-tonic systems." Other poems, including "King Horn" and "Havelok the Dane," "are the medieval strict stress-meter, or the dolnik" (16). Thus, she sees Pearl as too regular to be dolnik.

Tarlinskaja argues that anacruses should be counted separately from the dips that occur between ictuses. Her rationale is logical; not only do inter-ictic dips vary from 1-2 syllables while anacruses vary from 0-2 and therefore are different in kind, but her data also show that "monosyllabic anacruses are much more common than monosyllabic inter-ictic intervals" and thus also differ in number (29). My results show that *Pearl*'s anacruses, along with the wheels of *Gawain*, which will be discussed below, differ in kind but not in number from the inter-ictic dips, which has led me to include them rather than exclude them from my results. In fact, gap 3, the third inter-ictic gap, has far fewer two-syllable dips than the anacruses, which further supports inclusion of all disyllabic intervals in the results.

The data from the first 300 lines of *Pearl* scanned according to the kinds of tightening measures employed by Chaucer to achieve his very regular alternating iambic pentameter show that *Pearl* has 126 disyllabic intervals, which is 10.5% of the 1200 intervals available.[209] In *Gawain*'s 404 wheel lines, there are 133 disyllabic intervals of the 1212 intervals available, which is 11%. It is curious that the percentages are so close, and perhaps indicative of a poet who wrote a consistent medieval dolnik. In *Pearl*, there are twenty-seven disyllabic gaps in the anacruses or gap 0, thirty-eight in gap 1, forty-two in gap 2, and fourteen in gap 3; in *Gawain*'s wheels, there are forty-two disyllabic intervals in the anacrusis or gap 0, seventy-four in gap 1, and seventeen in gap 2. According to Tarlinskaja's definitions, these results barely move *Pearl* and the wheel

[209] A less strict application of elision could easily triple the number of disyllabic dips, moving the profiles even further into the dolnik range--as high as 30%.

lines out of the iambic range and into the range of folk ballads; it remains merely "not iambic."[210]

Compared to what Wimsatt and Beardsley would call the "marvelous monotony" of Chaucer and especially Gower's iambic lines, *Pearl* and the wheel lines are written in a different meter. Indeed, this comparison makes much sense, since the poetry must be understood in context. In late fourteenth century England, the London poets were developing a new alternating meter and setting rules for it. In doing so, they were scrupulously rigorous with their duple meter. Fast forward to the Romantics, and we see a group of poets who revolted against such "marvelous monotony" and deliberately crafted poems that were not iambic, such as Coleridge's "Christabel," a poem Tarlinskaja classifies as strict stress-meter that has the same percentage of disyllabic intervals as the wheel lines and *Pearl*.[211] In other words, breaking the rules only becomes a possibility once the rules are in place to be broken, so it is erroneous to group *Pearl* and poems of its time with post-medieval poems.

In the late fourteenth century, the iamb was at a crucial stage in its evolution. Chaucer was using the octosyllable, the first template meter imported into English,[212] and developing new five-syllable meter from the decasyllable in English, while Gower used the octosyllable to write the *Confessio Amantis*. Both poets wrote exceedingly strict duple meters; according to Martin J. Duffell, 97% of Chaucer's decasyllabic lines are in

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[210] Tarlinskaja explains her boundaries pp. 37-40. She includes all English poetry from 10% disyllabic intervals up in her data, but she sees the 10%-20% range as a grey area. Rather than creating a third term, she concludes that "not iambic" is closer to dolnik and treats these poems thus.
[211] See her discussion of Christabel, page 40.
[212] It was a logical start, given that it had the same number of ictuses as the archetypal native line.

duple time,[213] and 99% of Gower's octosyllabic lines "are iambic throughout."[214] Duffell and Dominique Billy also point out that all of Gower's octosyllables contain precisely eight syllables, while Chaucer's are only 84% regular primarily because of "the addition or omission of an initial unstressed syllable."[215] Thus there is both a difference in *degree* (the *Gawain*-poet has more double offbeats) and *kind*; Chaucer has the highest number of offbeats in the anacruses, which come to be treated differently in iambic pentameter (headless lines and inverted first feet), but the *Gawain* poet is happy to admit them there and in the middle, but not in gap 3.[216]

In fact, the source of much irregularity in the development of the English iambic line in the octosyllable from its inception, according to Duffell and Billy, was this tendency away from monosyllabic anacruses; logically, then, the intrusion of disyllabic dips in the inter-ictic gaps created the minority of irregular lines, though that is what defines the dolnik, according to Tarlinskaja. It is illuminating to compare the London poets' octosyllables to the *Gawain*-poet's medieval dolnik: of the ninety-one lines containing two-syllable dips, only 7 of them have precisely eight syllables. Thus, eighty-

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[213] "Chaucer, Gower, and the History of the Hendecasyllable" in *English Historical Metrics*, ed. by C.B. McCulley and J.J. Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 210-18. 218.

[214] Martin J. Duffell and Dominique Billy, "From Decasyllable to Pentameter: Gower's Contribution to English Metrics," *The Chaucer Review* 38 (2004), 383-400. 385.

[215] Duffell and Billy, 384.

[216] The medieval dolnik probably does not have an anacrusis, which would be consistent with the dolnik's development beside and probably even before the London experiments, whereas iambic pentameter is a later development. The fact that Tarlinskaja is able to distinguish the anacrusis in the 18th- and 19th-century poems she scans shows how the iambic anacrusis has influenced the modern dolnik.

four lines have more than eight syllables, or 28% are irregular. In comparison, Chaucer's octosyllable had 16% irregular lines and Gower's had 1%.[217]

[217] Duffell and Billy, 384.

CONCLUSION: EXCEPTIONS AND RULES

Several lines remain that deserve attention because they must be reconciled with the rules just established for medieval dolnik. In Tarlinskaja's definition of strict stress-meter, the maximum number of allowable syllables in any gap before the final one is two, yet one of the 404 wheel lines in SGGK and two lines from the first 300 in *Pearl* admit an unavoidable three-syllable dip—and that is after eliding many three-syllable dips that a less extreme scansion would permit.[218] Borroff notes the tendency of the poet to "avoid sequences of more than two intermediate syllables,"[219] and she lists the one wheel line as an exception to any rule of elision:

x / x x x / x / x
83 A semloker þat euer he syȝe

She does not offer any means to explain or accommodate this line, and perhaps there is no explanation or accommodation available, given that it is the one trisyllabic interval among 1212. But then there are these two lines in the 300-line sample of *Pearl* scanned for this study:

/ x / x x x / x /
191 Ryseȝ vp in hir araye ryalle

x / x x x / x / x /
250 And don me in þys del and gret daunger

One possible explanation for these lines is that they are simply unmetrical.

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[218] *Taktovík* is a meter that allows for three-syllable inter-ictic intervals (14-15). Given the very small number of three-syllable dips in these poems, it is safer to accommodate the exceptions rather than change the rules.
[219] Borroff 160-1.

But in a meter that bridges the accentual and syllable-stress traditions, the three-syllable interval may simply be rare. The fact that modern dolnik's anacruses operate differently from the medieval dolnik's is an indication that the exceptions allowed in the anacrusis of the modern dolnik are an outgrowth of the same exceptions allowed in the iambic meters. The medieval dolnik predates these rules, much as it predates the rules that forbid triple dips in iambic lines ("anapestic gallops" are two-syllable dips, to provide a comparison). The dips in the rhymed alliterative meter are not only rare, but they are never longer than three syllables, and the meter remains unquestionably deductive. In the unrhymed meter, the long dips can contain as many as five syllables, which make the resulting meter more strongly accentual and inductive. It is probable that the medieval dolnik allowed triple dips, which would make it slightly more accentual than Tarlinskaja's modern dolnik, and it is a feature of English as a stress-timed language that the template can accommodate the rare trisyllabic dip without missing a beat, as it were.

Chapter 5:

Beyond the Alliterative Revival

still it jumps borders.
Its taproot runs deeper
than underground rivers
and once it's been severed
. . .
the bits that remain will
spring up like dragons' teeth
a field full of soldiers
their spines at the ready.
(*from* "Why There Will Always Be Thistle,"
by Maxine Kumin)

THE REVIVAL REDEFINED

The overarching principle at work in this study is that there was not one alliterative meter. A large number of alliterative poems from this period should be grouped together because of their shared prosody, but *Destruction of Troy*, for one, stands apart because its poet does not apply the rule of half-line dissimilation that distinguishes the meter of the Revival poems, although he may have employed elision. He may have been uncertain in his use of final *–e*; proof of this uncertainty would present compelling metrical evidence that the poem was written past the prime of that doublet-rich period of English, at least in the West Midlands. On the other hand, he may simply have chosen to follow different rules, ones that allowed him masculine line endings on b-verses and b-verse rhythms in a-verses. After all, this poem is in an inductive and not deductive meter, and while it differs metrically from poems such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and

Piers Plowman, its meter has more in common with these alliterative poems and the poems that preceded it.

This "monotonous" and "soporific" poem—the most generous description I have found is "long"[220]—which enjoyed a rather long manuscript life opens slightly differently from the contemporaneous *Laud Troy Book*, which begins:

> Alle-myghty god in trinite,
> Sothfaste god in persones thre,
> Fadir, sone, and holi gost,
> In whom is witte and myghtes most,
> Be at this tale begynny[n]g
> And also at the endyng! (ll. 1-6)

In these lines, the author locates wit and might in the Holy Trinity, and asks that they be the alpha and omega of the poem. The alliterative poet has a slightly different opening, one that makes a more personal plea:

> Maistur in magesté maker of Alle,
> Endles and on euer to last!
> Now god of þi grace graunt me þi helpe,
> And wysshe me with wyt þis werke for to ende (ll. 1-4)

This poet appeals to God alone, and specifically requests help and wit to guide him through his translation. The intimacy of the appeal here is most likely a simple difference in style from the previous poet, but it could also reflect the excitement or concern of a poet working in a new meter.

We must be careful not to dismiss *Troy* from the alliterative tradition; it is similar enough to the other poems from its time and region that first Karl Luick and then Hoyt

[220] D. Vance Smith, 108. Although it is the longest of the alliterative poems, this emphasis on length (and the resulting monotony it creates) is somewhat misleading, even beyond the fact that the meter varies enough to be inductive. It is in fact the shortest of the three Middle English translations of Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae* (1287).

Duggan used it as a model alliterative poem, though the former considered it a later poem because of its use of final *-e*. It does not belong metrically in the same group as the other Revival poems, but its inductive meter is metrically closer to them than it is to any other meter. Many scholars have discussed the notion of an "alliterative tradition," but a clear definition of what this tradition is has eluded us. Native alliterative *patterning* demonstrably survived the Norman Conquest, as can be seen for example in Lawman's *Brut* and the Harley Lyrics, which will be discussed below. Alliteration is pleasing to the ear and adapts well to any meter, whether inductive or deductive. Rhythm is also pleasing to the ear, but rhythms such as the ones used by the Old English poets had to be taught in order for poets to be able to craft metrical lines. The Norman Conquest most likely ended the metrical schooling of English poets in this older form, though it is questionable how well the Old English meter would have served the radical language change that defines Middle English.

Whatever *metrical* tradition had survived underwent considerable modification in the Revival poems. The best evidence of this shift emerges in a comparison of the Old English and Middle English alliterative meters, which share many features. They are both inductive meters that rely on the hierarchy of language stress to achieve the meter. They both use alliteration to mark the natural coincidence of linguistic stress and metrical beat. They both are composed in unrhymed lines that use grammatical phrases/syntax to divide the line into two half-lines, the a-verse and the b-verse, separated by a caesura. These are similarities that would be easy to mimic, though. Superficially, then, the Middle English version looks like a continuation of the metrical tradition.

How they differ, however, gets into the deeper structure of the meter and leads to a very different conclusion. The term *half-line* better describes the Old English alliterative hemistichs, since the a-verses and b-verses were about the same length, and a minority of patterns could occur on either side of the caesura. Middle English alliterative verse, however, is asymmetrical, and metrists have long noted the tendency for the a-verse to be syllabically longer and semantically weightier. Although recent discoveries now include relatively small categories of a-verses that are shorter than b-verses or whose strong syllables give the appearance of the b-verse rhythm, the fact remains that the Middle English lines exclude what the Old English lines allowed. Perhaps as a result of having patterns and even verses that could occur in the a-verse or b-verse, the most common alliterative pattern in Old English was AX/AX; this metrical option did not exist in the Middle English alliterative line, which perhaps explains the fact that the most typical pattern is AA/AX. And finally, while both meters allowed for secondary stress, only Middle English allows for subordination of nouns and other words in the b-verse that carry linguistic stress; this property reveals influence from the non-native, syllabic meters.

Based on these differences, it is possible that the poets of the Revival sought to differentiate their meter from those currently in use as much as or even more than they emulated the Old English line.[221] Such a position presupposes that they had been taught these meters, methods of elision, syncope, and apocope, and the use of the large number

[221] Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, 64-5: "the Middle English poets were concerned to forge their own unambiguous meter."

of stress and syllabic doublets. To differentiate the new meter from contemporary meters, such as the octosyllabic rhymed couplets of "The Owl and the Nightingale," both visually and aurally, the poets may have decided to turn to an inductive meter that would allow many more unstressed syllables. Using the older and fuller forms of words added syllables and helped make the lines more old-fashioned; on the other hand, this meter works with natural language, and English as a stress-timed language has a varying number of syllables between linguistic stresses, the fact of which could explain the long dips. We cannot know which came first, but the result is a line very different from other verse forms, even other alliterative poems in inductive meters, as we will see below. The fact of the occasional three-beat a-verse provided another form of differentiation, though poems could have alternating numbers of ictuses per line, as several of the Harley Lyrics demonstrate below. The avoidance of ending b-verses on nouns that could undergo stress shift or masculine endings could also have been an attempt to differentiate the verse aurally from the rhymed verse—the b-verse ending is not the aural climax that the rhymed line end is. Finally, the most deductive aspect of the b-verse, that there is a template at work that can subordinate a syllable that would naturally receive stress, reveals that these lines cannot be completely separated from the influence of template meters. But then, the poets apparently never rejected template meters; they simply revolutionized the native meter.

The point here is that the two great metrical experiments of the latter half of the fourteenth century, alliterative meter and the nascent iambic pentameter, need not have developed in opposition to each other; rather, both meters could have sprung from

growing English nationalism during the Hundred Years' War. Both meters are *echt* English, though Chaucer's meter is derived from a continental syllabic meter, which makes sense for the London poet dubbed a "grant translateur" by French contemporary Eustache Deschamps, and the alliterative meter reaches the acme of a long-lasting West Midlands tradition of preserving English language, both in prose and poems: "it is clear that vernacular poetry, especially of the alliterative variety, had special currency along England's western fringe."[222] Combined with Chaucer's acknowledgment of Langland's plowman and his poetry, arguments of opposition between two competing groups of poets become less compelling. These experiments could simply have found a purchase in the poets' imaginations and the regions in which they wrote. We may never know what motivated these poets. Still, we can find perfectly alternating rhythms that we now call iambic[223] that are metrical in the a-verse because they are not b-verse types; this fact indicates that the poets were not avoiding this rhythm in particular. Here are some three-beat a-verses that look iambic from *Gawain* and the Prologue and Passus VI of *Piers*; as usual, the symbol • indicates an elided syllable:

	/ x / • x / x
1342	Voydez out þe avanters,
	x / x / x / x
1486	Bi alder-truest token
	x / x / • x /
Pr.66a	But holychirche and hij

[222] Daniel Birkholz, "Harley Lyrics and Hereford Clerics: The Implications of Mobility, c.1300-1351," Manuscript, 16. Birkholz presents a number of facts, including the disproportionately large number of Middle English manuscripts that survive from the West Midlands.

[223] *Iambic* is a word that this study has avoided in describing Chaucer's verse. According to the *OED*, this word was first used in 1586, almost two centuries after Chaucer's death.

x / • x / x / x

Pr.196a þe mase amonge vs alle

x / x / x / x

VI.298a Al Hunger eet in hast

/ x / x / x

VI.246 He þat hath shal haue

These rhythms are uncommon but metrical.

THE PROBLEM OF THE HARLEY LYRICS

Other poems composed during the Alliterative Revival beg further study in light of the discovery that *Troy* follows different rules. In *The English Alliterative Tradition*, Cable hypothesizes with varying degrees of certainty that three poems follow different rules from the metrical norm he had uncovered: *Piers Plowman*, *The Destruction of Troy*, and *Joseph of Arimathie*. We can now confidently scan the meter of the last of these three poems and discern whether it conforms to the principles established and elaborated in the previous chapters. But the most interesting discovery in the present study is the *Gawain*-poet's use of a medieval dolnik in *Gawain*'s bobs and wheels and in *Pearl*. By all appearances, this meter is not unusual at all; such template meters were in common use, as were the tightening devices such as elision, syncope, and apocope evidenced in Chaucer's poetry.

It is useful to compare the dolnik, which was a common meter, to the b-verse, which has the most innovative meter discussed in this study because its strong-stress meter shares some aspects of template meters. When compared to *Gawain*'s wheel lines, for example, we see that the b-verse has one constraint that is more stringent because the syllable count is tighter, *only one long dip*, and one constraint that is more accentual and thus looser in syllable count, *the long dip can have up to four syllables*. The opposite is true for the medieval dolnik in the wheels, which can have two, or less often, three long dips of two syllables, but only one long dip in the 404 wheel lines has three syllables, so three-syllable dips are rare, given the fact that only two lines in the 300-line sample of

Pearl have three-syllable dips. Both the b-verse and the medieval dolnik allow for metrical subordination of words which in natural language receive stress, but such subordination seldom occurs a single time in the b-verse,[224] while it happens quite often and even more than once per line in the alternating meter of the medieval dolnik. In this way, the template meter of the medieval dolnik much more closely resembles the evenly alternating meters used by Chaucer and Gower, and the b-verse is closer to the more purely accentual rhythm of the a-verse, as would be expected.

The medieval dolnik, which is a meter the *Gawain*-poet probably learned before tackling the alliterative meter, provides a way to analyze the meters of the Harley Lyrics. These poems appear in MS. Harley 2253, a miscellany in Anglo-Norman, Middle English, and Latin with everything from the bawdy to the devotional produced c. 1340, but famous for its thirty-two lyrics which are commonly considered the best lyric poetry before the age of Chaucer.[225] The Harley Lyrics are anomalous; they appear in the record without precedent or explanation, and their lack of metrical or literary anchor has isolated them from the later poetic developments in fourteenth century England: "Despite the efforts of those who agitate on their behalf, the Harley Lyrics do not lay demonstrable groundwork for late fourteenth-century metropolitan literary English, or even, to any significant degree, for the alliterative verse that would flourish along the Welsh

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[224] In the 353 lines of *Gawain* scanned for this study, eleven words that would normally receive stress are subordinated, and in the *Piers* sample, thirty-three such words are subordinated; nouns are most commonly subordinated to adjectives.

[225]This chapter uses the Brook edition; there are nine other lyrics that he decided to exclude, but the poems of interest are in his volume. Brook, G.L, ed. *The Harley Lyrics* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 1968). Brook argues that the manuscript was produced c. 1314-25 (3), but Birkholz presents the later date of about c. 1340 without comment. The later date coincides with arguments for English nationalism.

March."[226] Significantly, the appearance of these poems coincides with "a growing regional boosterism during the fourteenth century, a 'local patriotism' that Nigel Saul finds especially prevalent among the knights and esquires (or lesser gentry) of the Southwest Midlands: a group with increasing social and political self-consciousness although 'remarkably narrow horizons.'"[227]

The problem with the Harley Lyrics resembles the problem with *Pearl*, and by extension, the problem with *Gawain*'s wheel lines: how do we classify meters that defy classification as either syllable stress or accentual? The answer was easier with *Pearl*, given the proven mastery of the poet and the large number of verses in both poems from which to choose, once this poetic binary could be rejected. The same issue has hobbled a study of the Harley Lyrics, but instead of one excellent poet, we have a number of unknown poets, and instead of 404 wheel lines and 1212 lines of *Pearl*, we are lucky to exceed forty lines in a poem of lines that are rarely uniform within an individual poem. Richard H. Osberg was the first to propose a third model, alliterative prose, to provide a way to place the Harley Lyrics in the English poetic tradition.[228] More recently, Cable has used the Harley Lyrics to problematize the binary of *native* and *foreign*.[229] His arguments laid the foundation for the discovery and definition of medieval dolnik in Chapter 3; it makes sense to re-examine the Harley Lyrics with this new methodology.

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[226] Birkholz 8.
[227] Birkholz 20, quoting Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1981), 168, 255-57.
[228] Richard H. Osberg, 'Alliterative Technique in the Lyrics of MS Harley 2253', *Modern Philology,* 82 (1984), 125-55.
[229] Thomas Cable, "Foreign Influence, Native Continuation, and Metrical Typology in Alliterative Lyrics," forthcoming.

Eighteen of these lyrics use alliteration in the patterning; of these, Brook considers Nos. 3, 8, and 30 to belong to a tradition that includes the poems of the Alliterative Revival. Because this study has differentiated the alliterative meter from the dolnik and has claimed that the former was an innovation new to the latter half of the century, the alliterating (and perhaps alliterative) Harley lyrics provide an ideal test for these theories, and in the process they can be more firmly connected to the English poetic tradition. The discussion here includes the three poems Brook categorizes as alliterative along with the alliterating poems Nos. 2 and 5.

Cable approached these lines with the same methodology that he used on *Cleanness*, and he found a significant number of unelidable two-syllable dips. Given that the rules for elision, syncope, and apocope were well in place by mid-century, it is logical to reduce the number of syllables in these rhyming alliterative poems that so resemble *Pearl* and the wheel lines and see whether these lines use a medieval dolnik. This latter approach creates a number of single dips where Cable would argue for a two-syllable dip:

/ x / (x) x / x /
Har2.1 Middelerd for man wes mad

The (x) in the scansion marks the historical final *–e* in word *erd* (< OE. *eorþe*) that Cable counted. The scansions below, as in Chapter 3, allow historical final *–e* when it prevents clashing stresses, much as Chaucer would have done:

x / x / x / x / x
Har2.6 þe dreri domesdai to drede

In the previous line, *domesdai* must have the historical *–e* in the middle syllable to avoid clashing stress.

The previous lines are from Harley 2, which Brook named "The Three Foes of Men." The poet has deliberately avoided a French vocabulary, though the meter uses the continental template of alternating syllables, and the stanzas are linked via concatenation of ending and beginning lines, as many rhyming alliterative poems were, including *Pearl*. The seventy-seven lines of this rhyming alliterative poem are divided into seven stanzas of eleven lines each, with the rhyme scheme *abababababcbc*. The *c*-rhymes have three ictuses, while the *a*- and *b*-rhymes have four ictuses. Cable scanned the 63 lines with four ictuses and found that 17.2% of the offbeat positions were filled with a two-syllable and not a one-syllable dip. Surprisingly, this poem never has a two-syllable dip in the anacrusis; in the *Gawain*-poet's medieval dolnik, enough two-syllable dips occur in the opening dip to include it in the data. Thus, following Tarlinskaja, I have omitted the anacrusis position from the calculations; 8.5% of the inter-ictic dips have two syllables, which is a number that Tarlinskaja would call iambic and not dolnik.

The other rhyming poem is No. 5, given the title "The Lover's Complaint" by Brook. It consists of four stanzas of ten lines each with the rhyme scheme *aabaabbaab*. The meter appears as simple as the amorous yearning the lover has for his beloved. Here are the first ten lines of the poem,[230] scanned according to the idea of alternating syllables found in template meters:

x / x / x /
Wiþ longyng y am lad, [afflicted]

[230] Birkholz opens his article with these lines and glosses, the latter of which are his. I have provided the scansions.

x / x / x /	
on molde y waxe mad,	[earth]
x / x / x /	
a maide marreþ me;	
x / • x / x x /	
y grede, y grone, vnglad,	[lament]
x / x / x /	
for selden y am sad	[seldom]
x / x / x /	
þat semly forte se.	[fair one]
x / x / x /	
Leuedi, þou rewe me!	[beloved] [have pity on]
x / x / x x /	
To rouþe þou hauest me rad.	[sorrow] [brought]
x / • x / x /	
Be bote of þat y bad;	[remedy]
x / x / x /	
my lyf is long on þe. (1-10)	[depends on]

Based on this scansion, the meter seems surprisingly regular, with only two two-syllable inter-ictic dips. Also, line 7 shows the stress shift typical of template meters; *leuedi*, which is our modern *lady*, receives ictus on the second syllable to satisfy the meter. Medieval dolnik as defined in Chapter 3, then, cannot adequately describe the rhythm of either of these Harley Lyrics. The rhyming lyrics in template meters, whether they alliterate or not, need to be studied more closely to find these intersections of native speech rhythms with imported meter that perhaps encouraged experimentation of the type made famous by Chaucer.

The three lyrics that Brook placed in the alliterative tradition, Nos. 3, 8, and 30, present a different set of problems. All three poems rhyme, and it must be kept in mind that these poems preceded the Alliterative Revival by at least a decade. No. 3, titled "Annot and John," most closely resembles the Revival meter. The poem consists of five stanzas of ten lines each that rhyme *aaaaaaaabb*; alliteration "is used to excess" according to Brook,[231] though the alliterative patterns are typical, and only seven of the lines have heavy a-verses. Here are the first ten lines of this poem, scanned according to the rules presented in Chapter 2, not the rules for the medieval dolnik applied to Nos. 2 and 5:

x x x / • x x / x / x x /
Ichot a burde in a bour ase beryl so bryht

x / x x / x / x x /
ase saphyr in seluer semly on syht

x / x x / x x / x x /
ase iaspe þe gentil þat lemeþ wiþ lyht

x / x x / x x / x x /
ase gernet in golde ant ruby wel ryht

x / x • x / x x / x x /
ase onycle he ys on yholden on hyht

x / x x x / x x / x x x / x
ase diamaund þe dere in day when he is dyht

x x / x x / x / x x / x
he is coral ycud wiþ cayser and knyht

x x / x x / x x / x x / x
ase emeraude amorewen þis may haueþ myht

[231] Brook 22.

x / •x x / x x x x x / / x
þe myht of þe margarite haueþ þus mai mere

x / x • x x / x / x x / x
ffor charboncle ich hire ches bi chyn ant by chere (ll. 1-10)

This poem does not follow the rules of the Revival meter: three of the a-verses have a b-verse rhythm, and five of the b-verses have masculine endings. Moreover, only five long dips have three syllables, and there are no dips longer than that. At the same time, though, this meter cannot be medieval dolnik; all of the lines fall syntactically into half-lines, and the meter is inductive. Also, the use of elision never results in a perfectly alternating verse, as it quite often does in the dolnik. This meter most closely resembles what we see in *Destruction of Troy*, though the latter does not rhyme. One could argue that the rhythm of this poem, aided by alliteration and end-rhyme, is a perfect blend of continental and native meters, the result one would expect of poems "internationally sown and regionally grown."[232]

Harley No. 8, called "The Meeting in the Wood," is the most difficult of the three poems metrically; it is perhaps not surprising that Brook introduces this poem as "written in the native alliterative metre and, like most of the lyrics in that metre, it is rather obscure."[233] The poem uses both eight- and four-line stanzas that can be determined by the rhyme scheme *abababab* or *abab*. It has two quatrains and five octaves. Here is the first octave, scanned according to the principles outlined in Chapter 2:

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[232] Birkholz 46. The foundation of his argument about the community that created the Harley Lyrics is the enormous traffic of clerks between Hereford and Avignon in the first part of the fourteenth century.
[233] Brook 7.

x x / x x x / x / x x
In a fryht as y con fare fremede

x / x x / / x / x
y founde a wel feyr fenge to fere [noble, prize, meet]

x / x • x / x x / x x
heo glystnede ase gold when hit glemede

x x / x x / x x / x
nes ner gome so gladly on gere

x / x / x / x x x / x x
Y wolde wyte in world who hire kenede

x / x / x x x / x
þis burde bryht ȝef hire wil were

x x x / x / x x x / x x
Heo me bed go me gates lest hire gremede

x / x / x / x / x
ne kepte heo on henyng here (ll. 1-8)

The meter is indeed obscure. Only three of the eight lines have a syntactic break that would allow half-lines, which I have indicated, but the lack of these breaks in the remaining lines argues against this separation. The a-rhyme ends in two unaccented syllables, which has long been considered unmetrical for the b-verse, and the previous poet avoids these endings, too. Finally, lines 1, 3, and 7 have only three ictuses, not four, and line 5 could be reduced to three to fit this template; it is arguable that alliteration and ictus do not have to coincide in this poem, since there is no apparent structuring device in this poem, although the lack of a predictable pattern indicates that the meter is inductive, not deductive. As indecipherable as the meter is with its variable dips and clashing stresses, the use of alliteration and rhyme together reveals another mixing of traditions.

Cable uses Harley 30, "The Man in the Moon," to demonstrate how problematic our perceptions of "alliterative meter" and "accentual meter" are if we try to include this poem in the native tradition by aligning it the metrical rules of the Revival poems:

/ x x / x / x /
Mon in þe mone stond ant strit, *stands / strides*

x x / \ x x / x x / x
on is bot-forke is burþen he bereþ; *forked stick*

x x / x / x x x x / /
hit is muche wonder þat he nadoun slyt, *not down / falls*

x / x x (x) x / x x / x x / x
for doute leste he valle he shoddreþ ant shereþ. *fear / fall / trembles / veers*

x x / / x x x / (x) x /
When þe forst freseþ muche chele he byd; *frost freezes / cold / endure*

x / x x / x x / x x / x
þe þornes beþ kene, is hattren to-tereþ *his clothes tear to pieces*

x x / x x / x / x x /
Nis no wyht in þe world þat wot when he syt,

x x (x) / x x / x x / x x / x
ne, bote hit bue þe hegge, whet wedes he were} *unless it be / hedge*

(ll. 1-8)[234]

The rhythm here is different from what we saw above in Harley 2 and 5, but it is also different from the *Gawain*-poet or Langland's rhythm; it most closely approximates the meter in No. 3. As Cable observes, 1b, 3b, 5b, and 7b are unmetrical by the Revival poets' rules. Except for 1b, these lines would not be unmetrical in the *Troy*-poet's meter, and the feel of the rhythm is closer to that poem and No. 3. This link should be

[234] Cable, "Foreign Influence," 14. These scansions use the methods described in Chapter 2. He uses (x) to note an elidable final *–e*.

investigated further, since it could mean that both poets were imitating the shorter Old English lines.

AUDIENCE AND THE ENGLISH BEAT

At the heart of this study lies the conviction that the meters of these poems are both knowable and teachable, both in the fourteenth and the twenty-first centuries. The fundamental support for this argument is the nature of English itself as a stress-timed language that creates the rhythm in the lines of the alliterative poems and creates tension when used with template meters. Yet the diversity of meters presented in this study makes a broader argument about the nature of Middle English poetry: it is fallacious to divide English meter into native and non-native rhythms. We must lay the arguments of Wimsatt and Beardsley to rest: in describing iambic pentameter as the meter of "the great English art tradition" of the past six centuries,[235] they not only perpetuate an insupportable binary of accentual and syllable-stress meters, but also in the process the native meters have remained sidelines because these meters are uncountable and thus unknowable. Chapter 2 argues that the meter of the Alliterative Revival is countable but far more flexible than a template meter could ever be. More importantly, this meter is teachable to all students of English poetry.

The other meters discussed in the remaining chapters, and especially the discussions of the five Harley Lyrics above, reveal a truth that anyone who argues that iambic pentameter is the "great English art tradition" will inevitably miss: the medieval audience expected diverse poems in diverse meters, to judge by the poems written in the fourteenth century, and that diversity included the inductive meter of the native tradition,

[235] Wimsatt and Beardsley 592.

given the evidence of Harley Nos. 3 and 30. This period of English poetry, then, was rich not only in syllable and stress doublets but also in meters that juggled in varying ways the native and continental influences.

But the stress-timed nature of English has not changed. The beauty of iambic pentameter lies in the tension created by language and meter. The opening lines of John Donne's "Holy Sonnet XIV" readily demonstrate how a master poet uses iambic pentameter:

/ x x / x / x / x /
Batter my heart, three-personed God, for you

x / x / x / x / x /
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend (ll. 1-2)

The energy of this poem emerges as the template meter barely contains linguistic stress. The first line opens with a traditional exception, the inverted first foot. In the adjective "three-personed," *three* is subordinated by the meter where it would not be in normal prose. This tension mounts in the next line, when *breathe* is subordinated for no other reason than the template, and the monosyllabic string of verbs fights against alternation. Donne's rhythm mirrors the barely controlled passion of the speaker. Be that as it may, this sonnet is unquestionably written in iambic pentameter.

Perhaps we have become too used to this delicious tension of language and meter possible in template meters. Maxine Kumin's "Why There Will Always Be Thistle" recently created a metrical conundrum on a poetry listserv: "some say it's accentual, some say it is basically amphibrachic dimeter, some say dactylic, some say dipodic, some say

it's all of the above."[236] The poem is in three 13-line stanzas, and it does not rhyme. Here is the middle stanza, from which the epigraph of this chapter comes:

/ x x x / x
Outlawed in most Northern
/ x x / x
states of the Union
/ x x / x
still it jumps borders.
x / x x / x
Its taproot runs deeper
x / x x / x
than underground rivers
x / x x / x
and once it's been severed
x / x x / x
by breadknife or shovel
x / x x / x
-two popular methods
x / x x / x
employed by the desperate-
x / x x / x
the bits that remain will
/ x x / x x
spring up like dragons' teeth
x / x x / x
a field full of soldiers
x / x x / x
their spines at the ready. (14-26)

Although the meter largely adheres to an **x / x x / x** template, the language creates the meter. The scansions here reveal lines that look like the alliterative b-verse with the feminine ending, two beats, and one long dip; only line 24 ends in two unstressed syllables, but that "unmetrical" ending underlines the astonishing fact that this meter is inductive. In deductive meters, the template *can* impose itself on the language; see

[236] In an e-mail message forwarded to me from Thomas Cable, July 22, 2007.

Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne (as demonstrated above), Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson, and even Robert Browning, Yeats, and Frost. Inductive meters, on the other hand, lack a template that can impose itself on the language, and our efforts to make such meters fit a template will be as successful as the attempts of "the desperate" to contain thistles.

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Vita

Kristin Lynn Cole was born in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 22, 1971, the daughter of Carole Petit Lapensohn and Merrill Grant Cole, Sr. After graduating salutatorian from Rutherford Senior High School, Panama City, Florida, in 1990, she entered Hanover College in Hanover, Indiana, in 1992, where she was awarded study grants to Germany and Belize. She received a Bachelor of Arts in English and in German, and graduated *magna cum laude* in May 1996. During the next three years, she taught English at Czech Technical University in Prague, Czech Republic. In August 1999, she entered The Graduate School at The University of Texas, where she earned her Master of Arts in English in August, 2002. During her graduate career, she has been awarded fellowships to study medieval Iceland in Reykjavik and modern Swedish in Uppsala; she developed grammar, punctuation, spelling, and writing modules for the companion website to The Penguin Handbook, 2nd ed., and created the vocabulary portion of a practice test for the ABCTE; she was selected as an instructor to pilot the SPURS program, which partners high school classes from underrepresented campuses with college writing classes; and she taught American culture to English teaching peers from Argentina through a grant from the U.S. Embassy, and conversation and pronunciation to students from around the world.

Permanent address: 3201 Speedway Apt 5
Austin, TX 78705

This dissertation was typed by the author.